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A BABE IN BOHEMIA

BY

FRANK DANBY

AUTHOR OF "DR. PHILLIPS, A MAIDA VALE IDYLL,"
"THE HEART OF A CHILD"

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A BABE IN BOHEMIA

CHAPTER I

BOHEMIA is a vast city—a city growing daily more extensive as the repute of its charms attracts one by one the Prince and the poet, the Archbishop and the artist. In such a city there are Palaces and pig-sties, there is an Aristocracy and a democracy, there are the Pharisees and the publicans.

No. 200, Southampton Row, W.C., the house where the Babe first saw the light, the house in which her twin brother Marius took his last glance at it, a dim and uncertain glance enough, is not a segment of aristocratic Bohemia. It is a low house leading straight on to the street, the windows dulled with the smoke from Tottenham Court Road, dreary with mists from Russell Square. The railings are begrimed, the stone area green and worn with neglect and decay. The bell hangs loosely in its socket, and the knocker is wrenched off its bidding-place. But for all its dirt, neglect, decay, No. 200, Southampton Row is in the heart of the City, the gay, rollicking, careless capital of Prague.

Respectability frowns at it from over the way,

whitens its steps perennially, brightens its bell-handles, and hangs up its white window-curtains. Respectability round the corner, virtuously using its latch-key as it returns from the City, thanks God that "we are not as they." Respectability next door is kept complainingly awake by the midnight cabs and the midnight music, the racket of wine-parties and supper-parties, the sound of the piano and the noise of brawling voices. They are heard chaffing phlegmatic policemen as the revellers depart in the early morning, rolling homeward singing noisily as the pale moon fades in the glow of dawn.

This was the home in which Lucilla was brought up; such a home as a man like Roland Lewesham can make for his children.

Roland Lewesham, proprietor of *Footlights*, and putative editor of that weekly journal, was a largely-built man, about forty years of age, above middle height, and aldermanic of figure. His features were coarse, his eyes bloodshot, his nose made one suspicious. He wore glasses, and had a habit of pushing them back and fidgeting with them constantly. His big head looked brainy, but he had a weak mouth and chin, sweet in the smiling, that contradicted the promise of the brow. He has founded a new school of journalism. Everyone in London knows, or knows of, Roland Lewesham.

Yet Roly—he was the sort of man that even strangers called Roly—was country-bred and country-born. Honourable and cleanly living people were Roly's parents; the man tilled the ground,

the woman tended her cows and chickens. Bad agricultural years respected their thrift, and passed them by harmless, the rain softened their seed, the sun ripened their corn, their granaries were well filled, and their fruit-trees bowed under the weight of the fruit. Seventeen years they toiled together, with hearts a little empty save of each other, hardening perhaps in the weathers, but sweet and sound. Then, when it seemed too late for hope, their many prayers were answered, and Roly was born.

A strange sapling to grow from such a tree! A country lad, the idol of his old parents, quick at his lessons, eager in play, rosy-cheeked and active, fair, wholesome and abundantly English.

And so he might have been living until now, undeveloped, primitive, harmless, but for William Ringer, and William Ringer's training-stables that were within a walk of his home. How dull was agriculture compared to those rows of boxes with their sleek and shining-coated occupants! How few the pence gathered slowly with sweating brow and horny hand, compared to the gold that flowed easily to the inspired backer of Bellerophon or his stable companion!

The companionship of stable-boys and racing tofts had its usual results. There was not much evil in Roland Lewesham, and what there was might have remained for ever dormant, but there was an eager, excitable, nervous nature, and there had been no training or exercise in self-repression. When he lost more than he could pay, and he was barely nineteen when this inevitable incident

occurred, he could not bear to face those parents of his who trusted and believed in him, even looked up to him, so he left them. Rather than face their surprise, their disappointment, he fled. He let them suffer, let their hearts bleed for him, but could not bear to see it. This was Roly in the bud and as he became in the blossom. Perhaps there is something lovable in such weakness. Tender-hearted, he could not bear to see the pain of their disappointment; that by flight he doubled it did not occur to him.

He came to London at nineteen years of age, country bred and born, ignorant but eager. The metropolis acted upon him quickly, corroding his brightness; his insensitive ears became attuned to the roar of the multitude, losing their relish for sweeter sounds. Bright as a mirror, the breath of the city tarnished him, soon he no longer reflected the loving faces of his parents, or the merriment of his boy friends. He became possessed with desires; his manhood awoke in a hot and noxious atmosphere, and he absorbed the atmosphere, breathing it back, later on adding his quota to the general murkiness.

There is no need to dwell upon the details of his fall. Those friends he gathers round him now, for Roly Lewesham has a very real existence in London to-day, would be surprised to hear that it can be considered a fall from village hero and the living joy of an old farmer and his wife to being the editor of *Footlights*, and one of the "dearest old chappies in the world."

Temptations abound* in every man's life, but some are strong to withstand them ; others, not bred in the country, can see through mists of ephemeral delight to the gross body they cover. Impetuous Roly saw nothing but pleasure, and he was as eager for pleasure in his early youth as he became for excitement in his more mature manhood.

There was no one to help or guide him. The old couple, dreaming of him in the vale of their descending years, never saw him differently than as the answer to prayer, never doubted but that up there in London he was making his fortune, that one day he would return to gladden their eyes with his presence, their ears with the story of his triumphs.

But up there in London on the Tom Tiddler's ground of the metropolis he scattered guineas for more prudent hands to garner.

He had no guide but youth and recklessness ; the old couple in the country were alone in their age, and went down into the Valley of the Shadow of Death with hearts that ached and eyes that were red with weeping for a prodigal who did not return. London swallowed up Roly. Gambling on the turf was only the commencement ; other vices followed. He grew in wisdom eventually, but the knowledge came too late to profit him, it came when the hopes of his early manhood and the charm of his early manner had left him for ever, when satiety and perhaps remorse drove him to fresh excesses, against which his new-born wisdom profited him nothing.

His father died first. The mother lived long enough to see her bright and beautiful boy in his profitless and degraded manhood.

Whence came the two children he brought her one day, the twin babies whom he asked her to take and bring up for his sake and to let them comfort her in her loneliness and disappointment ?

She never asked, and Roly never told her ; the shame of their birth was not for her to hear ; their mother's name was to be forgotten, to perish for ever off the face of the earth. And so it came about.

They were puny babes, these children of Roly and that nameless one. Marius, the boy, was an epileptic, the seeds of his malady developed fast, and as it developed, there went by the board all hopes of influencing Roly through his children. The hope his old mother cherished for a time of luring her son back to her through these little ones faded, as all hopes in and about Roly had a way of fading.

She kept the children until she died, but Roly lived his life apart from her and them. He loved his mother always, this developed Roly, this hard-drinking, loose-living Roland ; he caressed her always, she never heard from his lips any ungentle word, he never lied to her or deceived her, except by holding back that which would trouble her. He had no moral backbone, became in time unable to distinguish between right and wrong, all his finer senses decayed and destroyed ; but it must be written of him that he loved his mother, in his own light and fitful way.

When she died he brought the children to Southampton Row, to Nettie. Whether or not the mother of the children was forgotten, Roly had formed other ties. Such men as Roland Lewesham rarely live alone, and at the time his mother died, when he brought the children to London, Nettie was the spirit of his anything but domestic hearth.

Nettie was, had been . . . but never mind Nettie's career; it would fill a volume, and the volume be interdicted, the writing a waste of time. She went to live with Roly, robbing him of all he had left of ambition, taking from him the last remnant of his self-respect, his sense of order and decency. She had enjoyed for some time now the courtesy title and all privileges as Mrs. Roland Lewesham.

Roly spent his money right royally. Nettie, getting on in years, and off in attractions, thought his attention should be turned to increasing instead of decreasing his income. There was something very bright about Nettie's intelligence. And she knew her world, such a world as it was, quite well.

Roly had had as good an education as the local school could afford him; in whatever he undertook as a boy he had been easily first. Which of his talents to turn to account was his only doubt when Nettie began to drum into him that he must make money for them both.

"Shall I go to the Bar?" he asked her.

"The bar!" retorted Nettie; "you'd never get any further."

The misunderstanding was natural, for Roly

had grown to think that of all enjoyable feelings few were so delightful as the irresponsibility that comes upon the semi-drunk. But when the misunderstanding was cleared up, the idea of studying for a profession at his time of life was negatived by the lady to whom he looked for guidance.

There are several careers in Bohemia open to a young man with a little brains, a little money, and a popular burlesque actress, for so Nettie was designated, at his command.

Roly took a theatre. That was the climax of the discussions as to ways and means, and although he did not become a millionaire at the business, he ~~mis~~managed it less than most amateurs.

The children were growing up whilst Roly was the proprietor of the "Leggeries," as his place of amusement was aptly nicknamed. And Nettie was also growing, not exactly up, but rather down; her voice no longer what it had been, and her dancing merely a tradition. Before failure had time to write its indelible letters across the portal of the theatre, Nettie retired, and as it was not in her to see another star arise in her place, Roly retired with her.

But the money he had made at the "Leggeries" was not enough to keep the home going for ever. He had gathered around him a large circle of friends, and he had made no enemies. Roly never had an enemy, all his weaknesses were lovable. His friends were principally sporting men and theatrical women, but Nettie's desire for good notices added journalists to the group.

Who first started the idea was never quite remembered. But an idea came, and materialised almost immediately into action. "Roly must have a paper;" there was room for another theatrical paper; all these friends of his would write for him, that was how to make a fortune!

"Hoorah! that's the idea; Roly shall have a paper."

Footlights sprang into success almost with the first number; it caught on, and it settled the question of Roly's income in a sufficiently satisfactory manner.

Roly's years in town left him very little bucolic ignorance. He had ceased to be a living-for-the-bookmakers, and even learnt to add to his income by a timely bet. In truth, the lad, who had almost been brought up in a training-stable, possessed a very pretty knowledge of the noble beast. Fortunately, also, just about the time Roly left off theatre-managing, and had a little ready money, William Ringer was in pecuniary difficulties. Roly tided him over them and the information he received in return helped the paper to a reputation.

Roly's sporting article, the one thing in the paper he always wrote himself, was well done. When success was assured, and money came in abundantly, he bought horses, and put them in training. If he never had a Derby winner he nevertheless brought off one or two successful coups in less classical events. His ownership helped him to be what is called "in the know." It was really the racing information rather than the pleasing details as

to the private life of actresses that gave *Footlights* its place.

Roly's instructions to his staff were clear :

"None of your sweetness and light," he said ; "sweetness and light are off. Excitement, glare, that's what people want, and I mean to give it them ; something spicy, something with a flavour in it. Teddie and I will see the sporting is kept up to the mark. You fellows must fill up with all the good things you can get hold of. Mordaunt Rivers will boss that."

With such instructions, and the able lieutenancy of an old friend of Nettie's, Mr. Mordaunt Rivers, *Footlights* breasted the tide and floated into popularity. Nettie was the key that unlocked to the mercurial son of the old yeoman the dressing-rooms of many actresses, let him into all the gossip of the *coulisses*.

Footlights even came to have a certain amount of influence, and in pursuit of it the house in Southampton Row was daily and nightly thronged with a company difficult to parallel in any other city than London, in any other quarter than Bohemia.

Journalists, clean and dull, brilliant but soiled, striving upwards or sinking downwards ; trainers and racing men ; young lordlings who patronised the stage, young actresses who patronised them ; oyster-shop proprietors, stage-managers, prize-fighters and music-hall singers ; anybody and everybody who could make Roly laugh or pay Nettie the compliments that she craved for the more as she evoked them the less were welcomed in Southampton Row.

They practised an 'unbridled hospitality, the house was the very paradise of bar-loafers; and so amusing were the scenes that occurred and the incidents which developed, that a column of the paper soon became 'the medium through which an interested and curious world watched the proceedings.

They invented words and phrases, this circle of the apostles of loose living. They corresponded with each other and the outer world by means of "Replies to Contributors," couched in their own peculiar vernacular, advertised their favourite restaurants free of charge, and made the fortune of more than one innkeeper who gave credit for dinners and suppers. For the small sum of one penny the British public read about them and their doings every week. The article was written in collaboration and headed "Nights out!"

Bacchus was their god, and soon the title of *Footlights* was supplemented by that of the *Guzzler's Gazette*. Roly became known as "Guzzleton," and all the synonyms of drink were freely lavished on the rest of the staff, who achieved fame or notoriety and became world-renowned under their nicknames.

What orgies there were under that roof! The neighbourhood was scandalised, the nights turned into uproarious day. Roly had no time to remember anything but the last good story or the next bad song. Nettie was queen of the revels, and it is sufficient to say that her myrmidons were worthy of their queen.

Such was the house) to which Roly brought his

twin children, eight years' ago now. For eight years the children had lived there, high up under the roof, away from the staff and the gaiety, neglected, forgotten, practically alone. There were two of them, a boy and a girl, Marius and Lucilla. Soon there would be only one !

There was drink and talk downstairs whilst Marius lay dying, but the din was hushed when the news spread that he was dead. Off went the gay young men and the gayer women, shrinking away one by one as death poised its black wings over the house, shedding its gloom in a message they were not ready to hear.

CHAPTER II

BUT Marius was not alone in his death-agonies. One there was who had shared for these long eight years all the horrors of his life, one who had lived by him, with him, benumbed by the burden, paralysed by the weight, trying always to hide from him and from herself the dreadful physical shrinking that his infirmities awoke in her.

For there was the fact in all its native hideousness. Marius, the only son of Roly, the brilliant editor of *Footlights*, was an epileptic.

And for eight years now—ever since her grandmother died, and dying left no one to take up the responsibilities Roly had been so glad to drop—Lucilla, his twin sister, had lived with Marius alone in these dull upstairs rooms, looked out of the dirty windows and envied the neat and prim little girls, with their plaits and governesses, and air of being hemmed in by laws and rules and restrictions; had turned away from the sight, her child's heart sick with longing for the care, and the love, and the very restrictions which proved that love and care. She had turned away from the window to meet the unsympathetic eyes of her unhappier brother.

Marius's dim eyes glazing unspeculative, his

loose limbs, as if badly connected with the parent trunk, bringing him now into contact with this, another with that article of furniture, his heavy feet planted springless on the floor, Marius, poor, slow-speeched, half-idiot Marius, was her constant and only companion.

If the sound of music and of laughter penetrated to her ears, and awoke in her heart, that, if only a child's heart, was yet a girl-child's heart, a desire, innocent, human, feminine, for pleasure and companionship and the unknown joys of the world, and she would look at him for sympathy, his unresponsive face would but mock her with the feeble ghost of a sunless smile that came into his face whenever he looked at her, who was his sun.

Lucilla at the time her story opens was still but a child, although seventeen summers had come and gone to ripen the pale corn-colour of her hair into 'red-gold, to deepen the blue of her sad young eyes, to mould into form the rose-leaf sensitive lips; but a child unnaturally burdened. Marius, octopus-like, had twined his long arms around her, sucking the blood from her cheeks and lips, the light from her eyes. He had claimed from her, and had from her, everything! She had thirsted for knowledge and for light, but his dull brain muddled the source from which she would drink. Pure and fresh and free she would have been, but his inert body caressed her with all an idiot's animal-like desire for contact, clung to her side, hung his heavy head on her lap, crushed her under the weight of his dreadful personality.

And now Marius was dying!

The room he lay in was large and bare, the carpet thick, the window grated. He lay on a big low bed, curiously surrounded with twine netting. She stood beside the bed and tended him nervously, for the last seizure had been a scene to make the stoutest heart quake.

The sun streamed into the room and slanted a dusty shaft of light on to Marius's face, the convulsed and swollen face of the dying idiot. The dusty shaft of light brought into relief every hideous feature of that death-bed, the writhing figure, the large head rolling from side to side, its unseeing, squinting eyes strained and bloodshot, the blood-stained foam gathered in the corners of the mouth and on the spotted and disordered sheets, the feeble twitchings and tremblings that remained after the violence of the epileptic fit had worn itself out.

His shrieks were still ringing in her ears as she had heard them for hours—endless, terrible, anguish-haunted hours; but now the utterer was dumb. Feebler and feebler had grown the movements, duller and more glazed his eyes; a clear whiteness seemed to wipe out the dusky pallor of the skin. His cheeks fell in and the loose lips stiffened into rigidity.

Epileptic in his cradle, idiotic in his boyhood, dying horribly before manhood was reached, Death dealt with him more pitifully than life had ever done, smoothed his distorted features, stilled him into a dignity he had never known.

But the death that stilled him appalled her

more than all else she had suffered. What did she see that made her start and shudder, and rush from the room, her hands before her eyes to shut out the sight, her heart beating violently with a new strange fear, her legs trembling under her, and her lips white?

Only this. In the dignity of death there came back to the unfortunate boy the semblance of that sentient soul of which disease had robbed him. It illuminated him, and now in the dead face Lucilla could see a likeness, one that terrified her. For it was a likeness to herself! Her weakened mind, unhinged with the long strain, saw a new smile on his dead face, as if in death that poor brain of his had awakened, been made whole. She pressed her hands to her brow:

"He has taken my brain. I am like him; he has become me. O God! Oh, help! the room is going round me! I am going mad! I can't think what is happening to me."

She felt her mouth quiver, and saw it distorted, felt her limbs twitching, and imagined they writhed, recognised faintness coming upon her, and feared it insanity. It was hours before anyone came into the room, to find the boy dead and calm on the bed, the girl moaning in unconsciousness on the floor.

Lucilla went through an illness after that; long nights of fever, when she would rave that Marius was near her, he was sucking her brain with his damp kisses on her forehead. She would shriek that his cold blue hands were around her throat, and that he was crushing her under his loose, ill-

guided movements. There were long days of semi-consciousness, in which Marius was always in the room. She would start as she had started from her sleep so often, woke by his screams, wordless, as of some dumb animal in pain. She would see again his convulsions as the epileptic demon tightened its hideous grasp and shook him with an earthquake force, until arms, and legs, and loose bitten lips, and heavy head, all shook and trembled, and were flung about directionless in that remorseless shaking. She would lie quiet for a time after such a vision, her heart beating fast, the big drops of perspiration on her forehead, waiting, waiting in dread lest that same demon should seize and rend her, making her hideous and hateful as he had been hideous and hateful to all who saw him.

So she lay for many days, not realising her freedom, nor knowing that Marius was at rest. It seemed as if she were drifting to join him, not in his disordered life, as she feared, but in his death, where there would have been peace for her, that peace she was never destined to know.

And Roland might have remained as ignorant of her condition as he had been neglectful of her interests, but for the fact that doctors have consciences, and Dr. Grey was no exception to the rule.

Roly had had a deep bout of drinking after Marius's death, to help to drown the remembrances it evoked. Marius it was who had made a bad father of Roly. Roly had a gentle vein

in him, men of his stamp are not unkind to little children, but from his earliest infancy the boy had damped any possible pride of fatherhood. The intelligence, which is the charm of dawning childhood, had never beamed out of Marius's eyes; that dull, heavy head, growing heavier as the years rolled on, never encouraged his ambition nor flattered his paternal pride. His only son, Marius, never calling on the name of "father," never giving back baby-smile for loving glance, grew through dull babyhood to vacant-eyed childhood, when he stopped speechless on the threshold of understanding. Roly was nervous enough, and imaginative enough, to see in the boy an embodied retribution, his frail young mother's transmitted revenge. He ignored the children, associating one with the other in his mind, providing nurse or governess for them, trusting to Nettie for the rest; taking no personal trouble about them. He drank deeply after Marius's death, giving rare orgies downstairs, surrounding himself with friends, while his young daughter fought her lonely battle between life and death.

But Dr. Grey had a duty to his patient to perform and would not ignore it.

"I want to speak to Mr. Lewesham," he said to the footman one evening, as he came downstairs, disheartened, from the sick room.

The footman was laden with a tray of glasses; the sound of many voices and loud laughter and the fumes of smoke came through the half-open dining-room door.

"The master is engaged." answered the man doubtfully, looking first at his tray, then at the door.

"Never mind if he is engaged or not ; my business is important. Announce me to him," he said, peremptorily.

John put the tray down, threw open the door, and announced,

"Dr. Grey."

The room was full of men, they had evidently been dining, and had the unrestraint of their condition. The doctor saw also two or three women, be-diamonded, talking loudly, smoking cigarettes, lounging in easy attitudes. The smoke-tainted atmosphere, and the incense with which Nettie's rooms were always filled, sickened him, fresh from such a different scene. But he stood his ground.

Roly was in the first stage of intoxication, flushed, nervous ; he was laughing with the easily aroused laughter of the semi-inebriate. But he staggered quickly to his feet when he saw the doctor.

"Do you want me ?" he said hurriedly — "Don't come in here. Weekly dinner—all my staff—matter of business—you understand."

He tried to explain, as he led the way hurriedly into a smaller and quieter room at the end of the passage. "What is it ? You want to speak to me ! Nothing wrong, I hope ? You didn't hear the story Rivers was telling . . ." He even began to repeat it, but relapsed into silence under the contemptuous look of the man who regarded him.

"Sit down, won't you? Have a drink? I must have one, I am as dry as a bone. Ring the bell for me, there's a good fellow, it is such a confoundedly long way off."

The Doctor rang as he was desired.

"A bottle of soda-water," he said laconically when the man came.

"By Jove! it *is* serious," said Roly with an attempt at jocularitv. "if I've got to hear it on temperance liquors."

"If you can control your hilarity for a few moments," the Doctor replied, "I shall have said all I have to say. I will not detain you longer, and you can, then, if you wish, return at once to your boon companions, and their good stories."

"Well, sit down, anyway: it gives me the jumps to see you standing over me."

Roly's hands were shaking as he filled the glass and drank off a long draught of soda-water. The Doctor looked at him steadily. They were men of the same age, and Dr. Grey had known Roly from the days he first came to London. Roly had had the advantages of more money, more leisure, more talent; but the Doctor had had strength of purpose. He thought of Roly's youth and promise as he looked at him now, the fumes of the wine passing off a little, restless vitality flickering in his blue eyes.

"Speak out, Doctor; don't stand there staring like a mute at a funeral!"

"At your son's funeral I ~~was~~ mute," said the other quickly, placing his chair opposite Roly's

and holding him with his eyes, "though perhaps I should have spoken. Do you remember these children's mother?" he asked abruptly.

Roly shuddered, the incident with the children's mother was one that even Roly had never learnt to look upon lightly. There are some things that may not be written about, cannot be printed, that fester in darkness for lack of the ventilation which a chaste government and some narrow purists deny them. She had been pretty once, this poor strayed Jenny, this long-dead and soon-forgotten victim of our vaunted civilisation. Dr. Grey had known and pitied her.

"I . . . I . . . what the devil do you mean by coming here and asking me about that . . . that . . .?"

"That unfortunate mother of those worse than unfortunate babies," continued the other quietly. "Don't pretend you have forgotten, nor forget that I, too, knew all about it. Listen to me for a few moments, that is all I ask. Then, of course you can do as you like."

"Go on," said Roly sullenly, taking another draught of the soda; "speak out."

"I attended her, saw her constantly until the inevitable end, and I spoke to you pretty plainly and seriously then, you will remember: you were not as far gone as you are now. I warned you they were delicate children, and would want every care. I told you of the dangers they would run, and you promised me that you would care for them."

"I took them to my mother," interrupted Roly: "it was the best thing I could do for them."

"But since she died?"

"Well! I could not help her dying, could I?"

"But you could help leaving them upstairs, unguarded, uncared for, neglected ever since."

Roland had no answer ready.

"Shall I tell you what you have done? You ruined, degraded, cast on the streets, practically murdered the children's mother. The wrong you are perpetrating now upon her daughter, that poor, dying child upstairs, is worse than murder, degrees worse."

"Lucilla! dying!" Roly staggered to his feet and faced his accuser. "*Dying!* And I, what the devil am I supposed to have done to her?"

He put his hair back from his forehead, his senses were not fully alert, the shadow from the past obscured them. He remembered the girl's mother, but the girl, what had he done to the girl?

"The boy was an epileptic, the girl nervous, impressionable, delicate: you have left them together, and alone, until the one has acted upon the other like some corrosive fluid. He has affected her heart and her brain, until she is dying, literally dying, of Marius, the only companion you have given her. She is dying of neglect, of solitude, of that sloping-roofed attic in which she sleeps, of hopelessness and fear, and the deprivation of human help, sympathy, and understanding. The very servant who is supposed to wait upon her spends her time gossiping in the kitchen."

“Wait a moment! Wait a moment!”

The Doctor was drawing on his gloves.

“I have nothing further to say; you can take your own course. It was my duty to speak, and I have spoken, that’s all.”

“Grey!” Roly’s voice was broken. Roly’s eyes had tears in them. “Grey, just tell me,” his voice was husky. “it’s not too late, is it? I’ll go up now. I’ll look after her. I’ve been so infernally busy.”

The Doctor was already at the door; again he heard the sounds of laughter, and the mingled scents of the house were about him, the close-laden atmosphere of incense and smoke.

“I don’t know,” he said abruptly. He waved his hand in the direction of the dining-room. “Tell them all about it; laugh it over with them. It is a joke fit for hell! Take those women upstairs, and let them hear your daughter’s ravings; they will be able to write more than a ~~column~~ about it afterwards, believe me!”

He slammed the door after him: he was gone.

CHAPTER III

LUCILLA lay in a sloping-roofed attic. When she awoke, when she looked up, the roof seemed to come down upon her, and there was no room between her and the roof for Marius. So Marius must lie closer to her, crush her, and all the phantoms she saw in fevered dreams could have no room, but must press about her, and make the air heavier and heavier, until her eyeballs were on fire with them, and her head stone-heavy.

She would put up her hot hands and touch that overhanging ceiling, to keep it off, to hold it up. But ~~one~~ day, when she woke, the ceiling was gone, it had moved higher up, a long way higher up, right out of her reach. And her head was lighter, the pain in her eyeballs gone. Marius was no longer there ; the figure by her side was not Marius.

Her fever-dulled eyes looked and looked again.

" You are better ? " someone asked in a husky voice.

" Where is the ceiling ? " she answered vaguely.

Roly, of course it was Roly who sat beside the bed, felt the tears start to his eyes. He was so " damned sorry " for her.

" You are in another room, being properly looked after. I did not know you were ill, that's the fact."

“It’s father, isn’t it ?”

A smile stole over her face, it had once been her happy day-dream that her father should come to love her ; and now it seemed the day-dream was true !

Roly sat beside her, he held her hand, he even put his head on the pillow beside her. Weak as water, easily influenced, Roly was full of penitence. Last night, after Dr. Grey left, he dismissed his friends, he had the girl taken downstairs into a better room, he sent for a hospital nurse for her. Nettie made no objection ; Nettie thought Lucilla was following her brother, and there would be an end of the annoyance she always felt about the children upstairs, the household difficulties they made, and the expense they were.

But Roly’s visit this morning to his daughter’s sick-room brought him tender thoughts in which Nettie had had no part. So frail and young as Lucilla looked against the pillow, so had her mother looked once. Hell ; yes, it was to hell he had sent the mother, and it was through terrible sufferings she had entered the gates. It loomed before himself as he sat there watching Lucilla. He had seen its yawning flame and belching mouth in the dry night that followed upon his interview with the Doctor. But there was a hope for him, a salvation for him, and he seized upon it. He would be good to Lucilla ; he had never meant otherwise. it was only the boy who had put him off, kept him from seeing them both. The sight of Marius had always upset, demoralised him ; so he reflected.

The hot fit of repentance was on Roly now. He issued his orders, no expense was to be spared, nor trouble. He visited her daily, ever lengthening visits, brought her fruit, flowers, books. There awoke in the girl's heart a passionate love and admiration for her father. She got well so quickly that even Dr. Grey was surprised. The colour came back to her cheeks, the light to her eyes, until one day, Roly, coming to her as usual in the morning, found her up and dressed, awaiting him, proud and glad to show him her recovered strength.

"What, up and dressed, and all right again ! That's jolly. You must come down for lunch ; we've got some people coming ; it will be a change for you."

She flushed with pleasure.

"Downstairs, down with you ? Oh, father !"

"Why not ? Your proper place is downstairs now ; you are grown-up, aren't you ?"

Roly's spirits had improved during her recovery ; seeing her up and well this morning they overflowed ; his mercurial temperament rose as quickly as it fell.

Nettie was not in the drawing-room when they went downstairs. She had an attack of neuralgia, a frequent ailment with Nettie when she was bored, and she had been very much bored since Roly had taken to virtue and nursing his daughter. But the room was not empty. Two men were there, one of whom looked up, struck with astonishment at the figure of Roly with a fair and

slender child. Roly was evidently embarrassed by Mordaunt's look of astonishment.

"Hullo, Mordaunt, you here already! Hope I haven't kept you waiting?" he said. "This is my daughter, she's been ill, you haven't met her before, have you?" Roly talked quickly to hide a certain nervousness. "Lucy, this is Mordaunt Rivers, my assistant-in-chief. I'd call him my sub-editor, only as he alters most of my 'copy' and argues with me about the rest, I suppose he considers the boot is on the other leg."

"Your father is rather inclined to be 'cerulean,' Miss Lewesham," answered Mordaunt easily. "And he is apt to repeat himself; the paper generally goes to press at midnight when we are all more or less blind, and your father, feeling his responsibilities, is of course blinder than the rest of us. . . ."

"Blind?" echoed Lucilla, observing her father affectionately. "Father's eyes are quite bright. I thought he saw well, although he wears glasses!"

Mordaunt laughed.

Roly made her sit in an easy-chair. She was feeling very happy, gazing around her with great interest. The two men attracted the least part of her attention; she was unconscious of Mordaunt's good looks, of the admiring glances Sinclair Furley was casting on her. The self-consciousness that commences to agitate the breast of a girl of seventeen in the presence of the other sex did not touch Lucilla; her imagination was sexless. The clinging of Marius was all she knew or had experienced of

the love of man, an experience that would cool a Messalina.

But she was no longer to live alone, with the ghost of Marius, in the empty nurseries ; that was the inner source of her new content.

She came down here with her father, was introduced to his friends, and felt happy. The sadness died out of her eyes, that now were bright with pleasure, and Mordaunt Rivers, who at first observed her with something like interest, thought :

“ Heartless little devil ! Might be Nettie’s own daughter. Her twin brother has been dead no time at all, and she is beaming all over ! ”

Mordaunt, of course, did not know what sort of an only brother Marius had been, and could not, therefore, take into consideration Lucilla’s sense of freedom from the incubus that had weighed her down, her hopefulness that at last she had won the love, the paternal love, she had always craved.

Lucilla forgot to grieve for Marius, not, as Mordaunt continued to think, in the pleasures of the table, or the furtive admiring glances of Sinclair Furlley, for, in truth, she cared little for the former, and never saw the latter ; but because there was a kindly glance in her father’s eyes when he looked at her, a kindly thought. He recommended dishes to her, asked how she felt.

It was a small luncheon-party for Southampton Row, where open house was kept. Mordaunt was always there, his short brown beard and gray cool eyes were familiar features. The

habitués were accustomed to his cynicism, to the way he snubbed Roly, and the way Roly depended upon and was influenced by him. Lucilla took some time to get accustomed to it, for her filial piety still held. There were some who said that, with all Roly's cleverness, if there had been no Mordaunt Rivers, there would have been no *Footlights*. Certainly the journal owed a great deal to his versatile pen and untiring energy.

Sinclair Furley was a protégé, almost, one might say, an invention of Roly's. He was an Irishman by birth, but French in sympathy and education. Two or three years ago Roly heard him in Paris at a third-rate *café chantant* and had enthusiastically and promptly imported him for the "Leggeries." There he would have been, was, indeed, a success. But as obscenity was sprawled in large letters over his every song and gesture, the licensing authorities, after repeated remonstrance, cut short his stage career. Now he had two columns to himself in *Footlights*, entitled *Bonbons*. The columns were written in the broadest French, translated into the mildest English, in which the humour of the whole thing consisted. By descent he was a gentleman, yet after his engagement with the theatre terminated abruptly, he did not disdain a nightly appearance at the Passion-Flower Club, that famous resort for hereditary legislators and ladies of the stage.

Sinclair Furley had fixed his fish-like eyes on Lucilla; when she appeared for the first time in her father's drawing-room, gloating over the beauty that even

in this undeveloped first period of her girlhood was rare and exotic. There was a gold and white harmony of hair and skin, with touches of colour in blue and rose of eyes and lips

“But what an exquisite child!” he murmured under his breath. He need not have been careful. If Lucilla heard she paid no heed to him nor what he said.

Two more men came in before lunch was over. They were Sinclair’s brother Tom, and Lord Lusher. The first, a journalist with little to do, and much time in which to do it, that he lavished in the company of anyone who would supply him with free smokes, free drinks, and a little “ready” now and again. The other, a gentleman, very youthful, who, having had his first attack of D.T. in Roly’s house, after one of Roly’s supper-parties, felt himself under an obligation to his host that his constant company could alone repay.

They talked and ate and drank. Roly was profusely hospitable, becoming more lively as the wine went round, but still remembering to pay his daughter this or that attention of the table. Lucilla was very quiet, answering in monosyllables when spoken to, striving very hard to understand what they were saying, and to know why they laughed.

Tom Furley and Mordaunt had been to a funeral that morning, and they were discussing it, Roly joining in.

“We had to stand all the time; there were no

press tickets, and neither stalls nor boxes," said Tom.

"Poor old Muggins! he had the only box himself. He always was a selfish beggar," put in Lord Lusher, who had neither good taste nor feeling, only a sense of humour.

"He was late, too," grumbled Tom, with his mouth full of pigeon-pie.

"Very. His duns think he should have been there years ago; they'd have been a bit in pocket."

"Are you going to notice the performance?" asked Sinclair Furley, waking up from the contemplation of Lucilla's profile, and suddenly realising that they had been somewhere, he had not gathered where.

The joke told.

"Of course, and we are going to slate it," answered Mordaunt, quickly. "The rev. gentleman spoke his lines too slowly."

"And the leading actor never spoke at all."

"I believe the parson gagged. And he never got a laugh."

Lucilla was very much at sea. They spoke an argot of their own, these contributors to the *Guzzler's Gazette*, these popular members of the *Cormorant Club* and the *Ooferies*, an argot that she could not follow.

In deference to her innocence, which they could not ignore, to her youth, which they could not overlook, they left out many good stories about Totties and Maudies and Claras who were not "De

Vere." But even then the talk, when the funeral was exhausted, ranged over a large field equally barren to her. And after a time, when they left the luncheon table and went back to the drawing-room to smoke, Roland as well as the others forgot Lucilla's presence. They grew interested in a new operetta that was being discussed, more men dropped in, argument and innuendo grew warm.

She sat quietly in a corner and listened, quite satisfied at being unnoticed, but feeling terribly ignorant, and quite astonished at the number of words and phrases she could not understand. She had never heard of the celebrities they were discussing so freely. She put her bewilderment down to her defective education, and made an inward resolve to ask her father, that dear father of hers, to help her to learn, to tell her what she must read to make herself more fit to be a companion for him and his friends.

Every now and then she would meet Sinclair Furley's eyes fixed upon her; they made her feel uncomfortable, and she would look the other way. His lank and unlovely countenance, the fat pallor of the face under the straight hair, repelled her. Lord Lusher's beardless face and bloodshot eyes were little more attractive. Tom Furley's huge untidy proportions presented no attractions for her.

But all the attention she could spare from her father was given to Mordaunt Rivers. His tall easy figure, his broad shoulders, appealed to her. She thought the mouth with its well-trimmed brown beard looked kind when he smiled, and he smiled

once in her direction ; his eyes were nice when they followed his mouth in the smiling. She admired the deftness of his hands as he rolled up his cigarettes ; his fingers were long, and there was a masculinity about them that was attractive. She had ample time to note all these things, even the fit of the gray morning suit, the brown boots, the white cuffs ; she noticed and watched, because no one spoke to her. Her father's guests had not found her interesting, she was too young, too little in their world. Sinclair Furley would have liked to converse with her, test her ingenuousness, but he had an appointment, and went away soon after lunch. She would have liked to talk to Mordaunt Rivers ; he seemed to her quite unlike all the others.

CHAPTER IV

THE reception-rooms in Southampton Row all opened into each other like a set of Japanese boxes. There were four rooms in all, the one in front, which was used as a dining-room, being the largest; from that they grew gradually smaller until the end one, which was little more than an extensive recess. They were all untidy, artistic, 'ull of incongruous things. Chippendale furniture, old prints and caricatures were on the walls, curtains in dingy art colours hung wherever curtains were possible, blue china and pampas grasses filled up corners. Portraits of actresses and professional beauties, draped and undraped, on easels and walls, testified to the tastes of the inhabitants.

It was close on four o'clock when Nettie came into the smoke-laden atmosphere. One peculiarity of this build of room is that the fumes of tobacco penetrate from one to another and linger always in the portières and draperies. Nettie came into the room with an expression on her face of serious ill-health, attired in a clinging tea-gown that accorded with her expression. The *habitués* of the house knew her mood at once from her face. For ill-health they read ill-temper, and were pre-

pared for its ebullition. Roland recognised it, too, for he, too, was used to it.

What was the secret of the influence Nettie had over Roland it would be difficult to discover, yet their frequent quarrels never resulted in anything but the consolidation of her position, and they had already lived together nearly ten years. Nettie's was a rudimentary nature, there was no finish about her, an entire absence of reticence was perhaps her most distinctive characteristic. She was an Irish-woman, and may once have had the proverbial beauty of her race. But the years, most of them spent behind the footlights, had robbed her of freshness; her features were still small and good, but she had supplemented the fading brilliancy of her hair with aureoline, of her cheeks and lips with carmine, of her eyes with kohl.

"Poof! how close this room is! You might have had more consideration for me and aired it before I came down, when you know how frightfully bad my neuralgia has been," she began. But as she was adding to the denseness of the atmosphere by a cigarette, the remark lost something of its point.

One or two men got up to offer her a chair, but, rejecting them, she went on:

"Thank you; Roly has my chair, although he has not the civility to get out of it."

Roland elevated his eyebrows, but made no effort to rise.

"Since when has this been your particular chair?" he asked; for time had robbed their intercourse of its little courtesies.

The conversation was suspended while the men waited to see what was to be the next move of the termagant. One or two, however, found they had pressing appointments, a not uncommon occurrence when Nettie was, in the language of the clique, "on the jump," and hastened to make their adieux. The others waited to see what was the real cause of the so-called neuralgia; the ailment was rarely autogenic, but had its rise in external circumstances, which she generally exposed naively and without much delay or consideration of anybody's feelings.

With the air of a martyr she took a low chair and sat silent for a few moments, puffing with short, jerky, feminine puffs at her cigarette; her attitude and expression intended to denote acute suffering.

An unlucky sneeze from Lucilla gave Nettie the opening for which she was looking.

"What on earth is that child doing here?" she asked, sitting suddenly up and staring at her as if utterly shocked and startled at the apparition.

But no one was taken in by her. The moment the words had left her lips Roland knew as well as if he had been upstairs while she was dressing that one of the household had told her of Lucilla's appearance, and that it was this she was about to resent. He wondered he had not guessed it before. Her attitude aroused the antagonism of his weak nature, and even before he answered, his decision was made.

"What should she be doing here?" he answered,

sitting up in his chair, prepared for the fray. "Is not a daughter's proper place in her father's drawing-room?"

"I did not know you kept a lunatic asylum," said Nettie, with assumed indifference.

Roland flushed with the anger that she always had power to arouse in him.

"You ought to," he answered savagely, "since I always keep you here;"

It was curious to notice the utter want of restraint they exhibited toward each other, notwithstanding the presence of their friends; curious and, in one sense, disgusting. It was an outside indication of the fact that these two people not only disregarded the laws of conventional morality, but even of conventional decorum.

Fortunately Lucilla had not heard the short dialogue. Noting the glance of dislike and disapproval her father's wife gave her when she entered, she had fled from the room, back to the solitude she knew so well.

But her father fought her battle right fatherly. His obstinacy was aroused; he had all the wordy obstinacy of weakness.

"She is old enough to take her place in society; I'm not going to have her shoved up in a back room and forgotten. There's enough room for you both in the house, God knows!" he said, after a few more bitter words had passed.

"Society!" sneered Nettie. "I suppose you call this society," she knew Roly's tender points, and that he was jealous for his guests, sensitive of

their feelings, "a lot of bar-loafers and penny-a-liners!"

Nettie in a rage had no scruples as to whom she insulted. It is only fair to say that those who knew her never resented what she said; and those who did not were soon enlightened, and took their own course.

"They are good enough for you, anyhow, too good, for you and your pals, Jenny Farrell and Tessie Gay."

"My friends are quite as good as your relations, an old farmer and a henwife . . ."

"Shut up, you——"

"I shan't. I won't have my house made into an asylum. I won't have her gibbering and raving down here. She's an idiot; you know she is an idiot, or next door to one! She'll be having fits in the drawing-room, and in the streets, and all over the place. She'll be foaming at the mouth. I won't have it!"

Nettie stamped her foot in her rage.

Mordaunt Rivers, who had not stirred during the controversy, but stood against the mantelpiece watching and listening with an amused smile, thought it time to interfere. Nettie had lost control over herself, Roland was white and almost speechless with rage. In another moment they would have been throwing things at each other. Mordaunt was the only person on earth who had any influence on Nettie.

"Why don't you let the matter rest?" he said coolly. "You know Roly is right. Something

must be done with the girl ; she is not a child any longer."

" I'm not going to mind his bastards ! "

Roland shouted something worse even than this. Mordaunt silenced him with difficulty.

" Don't interfere ; what is it to you ? "

" I like peace, and I want a drink ; I can't enjoy either while you two are sparring like two Kilkenny cats."

" Well, you can ring, I suppose. You don't want me to do it for you ? "

His ruse nevertheless was partially successful ; and by dint of asking Nettie's advice about the new play they had been discussing, and changing the conversation generally, the matter of Lucilla was dropped for the time being. The other men remaining rallied to his aid, they were all sick of the wrangling. New callers dropped in ; tea and brandies-and-sodas, cigars and cigarettes were produced, and the domestic atmosphere cleared a little. Nettie recovered her amiability presently, even dancing a few steps or breakdown to Tom Furley's accompaniment, to emphasise how badly Tottie had done it the first night of the new burlesque at the " Jollity." And then Tottie herself came in on her way from rehearsal, and Jenny with Dicky Dormer, and they all laughed and talked and flirted and drank. Once again Lucilla was forgotten, and the harsh words were as if they had never been uttered.

The afternoon waned and at last there was a general move. Some were going to dress for dinner, others to the theatre ; Nettie and Roly, with two

or three of the others, were due at the first night of a new play.

Roland took an opportunity to say to Mordaunt :

“Calm Nettie down, will you, there’s a good fellow ? I’m not going to leave that girl alone ; I shall take her with us to the ‘Jollity.’ ”

“I shouldn’t, if I were you. She isn’t very strong ; she has only just got over an illness, and her brother’s death, and all that sort of thing. Don’t rush it. Give Nettie time to get used to her and it will come right.”

“Do you think it will ? ” asked Roland doubtfully ; “Nettie’s got the devil’s own temper ! Tell her not to make a fool of herself, there’s a good chap. Help me a bit ; you know I’m right, don’t you ? ”

Roland always expected someone to help him ; he was always leaning on someone and never walked without some human crutch.

“I don’t know whether you’re right. For Heaven’s sake, don’t talk to me about right and wrong ! It is enough for me that you want the girl about you, and Nettie doesn’t. All I’ve got to do is to try and keep the peace between you, so that things are not made uncomfortable all round, and the paper suffer through lack of combination. That’s all that concerns me. By the way,” carelessly, “I suppose the girl is all right ? ”

Roly reddened ; he looked as if he could have struck his friend. Mordaunt put a quick hand on his shoulder.

“Don’t make a fool of yourself, Roly ; I did

not want to offend you. I heard the boy was . . . was a bit groggy, so I just asked, that's all."

"She is all right," answered Roly, in a muffled voice ; "there has never been anything the matter with her."

Alas, nevertheless, for poor Lucilla and her high hopes in Roly ! Roly was a very grave of dead hopes. Certainly he stuck to his guns for a short time. Lucilla was not to go back to her attic-room ; she was to lunch with them every day, to dine with them, to go out when and where they did. He issued his orders, and somehow or other, never mind what arguments he, or, perhaps, Mordaunt used, they were obeyed. Lucilla lunched downstairs, dined downstairs, sat about and listened to the gay talk she could not understand, to the laughter for which she never saw the provocation, and the gossip of which she never held the clue.

But she was not very happy. She tried so hard to understand, she failed so miserably in understanding what was going on. Then it seemed to her that the kindness had fled from her father's eyes, and that what she saw in them now was fear, that often he avoided her glance, looked away.

And Nettie ? Nettie, never scolded her, never said to her any of those harsh things she said to those around her, never molested her in any way. But, then, on the other hand, Nettie never said a kind, a welcoming, nor an encouraging word. She looked at her always with cold dislike ; the sensitive girl felt she was always in the way, always the fifth

wheel of the coach, the one person not wanted in that generous open household.

Her manners became more timid, deprecating; she was indefinably shy, and her ignorance weighed upon her. One day she asked her father if she might have another governess, if she might go on with her education. Roly was really trying to do his duty by the girl, but it was difficult with Nettie against him. All his better nature rose up when the girl looked at him appealingly with her blue eyes, when she touched him timidly with her soft lips, when she called him "father" in loving tones.

But he was used to Nettie, and to his mode of life, to drinking and loose living, and even looser talking. The girl reproached him by her presence and now he felt uncomfortable in his own home.

Then, again, Nettie and Mordaunt together had contrived, although without collusion, to poison the well-spring of his love. He could not help watching Lucilla for the signs of a malady she had not, could not help listening for a well-remembered shriek, such as had driven him from Marius even in his babyhood.

Weak Roly wavered and shirked and compromised; and still Mordaunt Rivers had his work cut out to keep the peace between him and Nettie.

CHAPTER V

It was natural Nettie should rebel against Roly's ukase. To have a girl-child always about her, dogging her heels when Roland was absent, noting what went on and judging it from a young girl's standpoint did not at all suit her mode of life.

Under the constant sense of irritation she became more neuralgic, snappish and quarrelsome. And what with that, and Roly's uneasiness and scruples about certain anecdotes and certain stories when told before the girl, things began to be thoroughly uncomfortable in Southampton Row.

Lucilla was a restraint. There was no disguising the fact ; there was a looseness in the very air of the house, a looseness of manners and talk, that was seriously interfered with by her presence. *Spotlights* permeated the home atmosphere. All the choicest anecdotes were first brought there ; clipped and arranged in such a form as should be compatible with the tone of the paper ; were written, expurgated, added to, over lunch, during dinner, or in the hour devoted to afternoon tea and brandies-and-sodas. Realistic stories were read aloud ; Roland believed in the future of realism ; in literature it was a comprehensive term with him. The poems were recited with becoming

emphasis. The correspondence of the paper was commented upon and enjoyed publicly and the correspondence of *Footlights* was curious in tone. Anecdotes, whose bestiality outweighed their wit, were sent in freely, and, although not published, often formed the theme for a brilliant reply ; others, with wit and bestiality about equally proportioned, generally found admission, with the assistance of either Roland's, or Rivers'; magic journalistic turn.

Anecdotes were hushed, and correspondence relegated to the office, during the first weeks of Roly's infatuation for Lucilla and Nettie had to chafe under the fact that her friends were now enjoying in private what they had always hitherto enjoyed with her. She felt it was hard on her, and it undoubtedly was ; for although she was not witty nor brilliant in the true acceptance of the terms, she could appreciate and enjoy the wit of others, particularly on unsavoury topics, and she was indefatigable in fishing up information from the dust-heap of life behind the scenes.

The "staff" missed her, and she missed them. Lucilla's appearance downstairs had revolutionised the house, and nobody was happier for the change. Nettie's acuteness soon perceived that Roly was wavering in his fancy for Lucilla, that Dr. Grey's warning to him was fading from his mind, that the girl was beginning to bore him. Still, he did not confess it ; he continually insisted on her appearance ; but he was out a great deal more, and this Nettie resented, although she continued by her conduct to render him uncomfort-

able at home. Certain things and certain people he still insisted should be kept from the girl; but personally he began to avoid her pale and wistful face.

Mordaunt Rivers was a very old friend of Nettie's; their friendship dated even further back than her connection with Roland.

Nettie sat in the easy-chair by the fireside, the dulness of the day hiding her lines of age, and softening the incongruities of her complexion. The room was crowded with broken knick-knacks that spoke of orgies past, it made no pretence to what Nettie always termed contemptuously "middle class cleanliness," but was cosy and warm in its disorder.

Mordaunt lounged in the chair opposite to her while she confided her grievance to him. He was well supplied with material comforts, a half-finished brandy-and-soda was by his side and a box of cigarettes lay open before him. He knew Nettie thoroughly, but whatever their past acquaintance may have been, in the present his feeling for her was perfectly compatible with the duty he owed his employer's wife.

Lucilla had gone to a picture-gallery with her father, so they had no fear of an interruption to their *tête-à-tête*.

"I want to talk to you," said Nettie complainingly, "but I never seem to have an opportunity now."

Mordaunt took the cigarette out of his mouth.

"What do you want to talk to me about?—the row between Maude Ponsonby and his lordship?"

"No. I could tell you more about that than you could tell me."

"Or what has become of the girl who was fourth from the right in the Gaiety chorus, the one with long plaits and bandy legs?"

"What has? though I believe I can guess."

"She has accepted a seat in the carriage of the old Duke of B——, and a pound a week is no longer invaluable to her. But if that wasn't what you wanted to ask me about, what was it? Nothing else has happened that I know of."

Nettie, debarred from many female joys and companionships, found her consolation in the gossip of the *coulisses*, and Mordaunt Rivers was purveyor-in-chief of this peculiar mental diet.

"It is that girl," she said slowly.

"That girl" unconsciously had been much in Mordaunt's mind lately; he did not pretend to misunderstand her.

"Well! what is there to be said?"

"Roly insists upon having her always hanging about."

"He is within his rights; it's his house."

"He would have been in the gutter by now if it hadn't been for me."

"Perhaps! and perhaps not. But that is beside the question. What is his motive, do you think? Is he getting jealous of you in his old age, and employing her as 'tec?" he asked perfunctorily, as he emptied his glass.

Satire was as much lost on Nettie as a rebuke from the Chair of an Irish member.

"No, no, it is not that ; but hé thinks she has been neglected."

"So hé wants you to introduce her into society ? "

"Yes."

"Well ? "

"Well," she broke out impatiently, "I loathe girls, and I hate being spied upon. I hate her stupid ways of looking as if she doesn't understand half that is said to her. I hate her when she tries to look knowing, and I hate her when she looks innocent. Bah ! it's beastly ! "

"What, her innocence ? "

"The whole thing."

Mordaunt put his glass down again and stood up, leaning against the dust-covered mantelpiece, with its crude ornaments, stale cigar-ends, and stains of sticky glasses. He was a tall man, somewhere between thirty-five and forty ; handsome as far as well-cut features and blue eyes can make beauty ; manly so far as a well-trimmed brown beard and moustache can make manliness. His expression was satirical, a sneer had become habitual to his lips. He despised everybody and everything about him, read them, saw their vices more prominently than their virtues ; despised himself for his life and his associates, but knew he was unfit for any other. What his youth had been, or who had been his parents, no one knew. The little world he lived in was aware only that he was an excellent journalist, something of a playwright, learned in musical comedy ; it was currently believed that Mordaunt Rivers could have done anything he chose.

Why he did not choose to do anything, why he had no ambitions, they never inquired. If he was celebrated among them for one thing more than another, it was for the absolutely low opinion he had of women; he saw in them all the masculine vices, without any of the redeeming masculine virtues. On one occasion when he was giving vent to these opinions, Roly, who prided himself on having a touch of sentiment in his literary style, remarked:

"One would think, to hear you talk, that you'd never had a mother, Rivers."

"Oh yes, I had," he replied bitterly; "that's just how I come to know women so well, and what a rotten lot they are."

Mordaunt Rivers was frequently in Southampton Row and Nettie always amused him. There was so little disguise about her; she was a living exemplification of all his theories about the sex. Nettie was irresponsible, passionate, changeable, with a cat-like fondness for warmth and comfort; she had no principle, no further guiding motive than gratification of her momentary whims, a flower of the footlights now running to seed.

He caressed his beard while he observed her, and thought over her perplexity. It was a pity she should be made uncomfortable; she had a habit of making things devilishly unpleasant for everybody when she was uncomfortable. And it was all about Roly's girl, too, Roly's girl, who Sinclair Furley admired and compared to French *fillettes* he had known.

"It is hard lines on you," he said sympathetically.

Nettie smoked incessantly. When she was "put out" her cigarette became more necessary than ever, the short, jerky, feminine puffs seemed to help her to self-expression.

"Hard lines! I should think it is. I am not going to stand it, that's about the size of it."

"What will you do?" he asked, elevating his eyebrows, smiling inquiringly.

"Do, do! I'll show him."

They looked at each other, and at what she saw in Mordaunt's expression Nettie reddened.

"You'll leave him?" Mordaunt laughed outright, a low pleasant laugh. "Don't make a fool of yourself, Nettie! Roly and you are settled for life."

"I don't see why," she answered viciously.

"Well, I do," he replied coolly. "In the first place, you can't do any better, and, in the second, you are quite devoted to him. The only thing you are suffering from now is jealousy."

"Jealousy of Roly! Rot! Did I interfere when he talked about nothing but that slack-rope woman and the 'purity of her life.' *Purity!* it made me sick, but I said nothing, or hardly anything." For Mordaunt had laughed again! "Did I make a fuss when he took Jenny about with him, and everybody was talking about it?"

"No, you didn't, any more than he interferes with you and Antonelli, or Captain Anderson, or Charlie, or half-a-dozen others. But that is nothing to do with it. You don't like having this girl hanging about and you've been in the devil's own temper these last few weeks. Now

the question is what are we going to do about it ? That's what you want to know, and I want to know it too."

Both of them smoked quietly for a moment or two after that. Mordaunt could say to Nettie what no one else dared ; he frequently mediated between her and Roland, if it can be said that Nettie respected anyone, Mordaunt Rivers was that one. She knew now that what he said was true, a mutual tolerance was the basis of what peace she and Roly enjoyed.

" Roly is as obstinate as a mule when he gets an idea into his head," she grumbled.

" He is in the right here, you know," continued her chosen adviser, quietly rolling up another cigarette. " What is he to do with the girl ? you can't expect him to keep her always in the nursery. You had better make up your mind to put up with the nuisance, he will tire of it soon, you will find—I am not sure he hasn't already started. Let him have a surfeit of his own way ; that is my advice."

" Her ' youth and innocence ' that he talks about gives me the pip."

" You were young once and I suppose you were even innocent ? "

He laughed, and she laughed, as if the idea of Nettie's innocence at any period of her life was a joke for both of them.

" I suppose you're right, and it won't last long," she said, when she had finished laughing.

" Which ? "

" Both ; Roly's infatuation, her innocence."

"Well," he replied, looking round him, "it is certainly a curious atmosphere in which innocence should flourish."

There fell a silence between them. Mordaunt's cigarette went out, and looking around him, thinking for a moment of Lucilla's or any young eyes on the society which he had chosen, he could not but see it differently. The woman before him, in her loose tea-gown, her pearl-powder, her paint, the many-scentedness that always hangs about such women struck him with a momentary sense of distaste, disgust.

Nettie was silent for a different reason; his words had struck a chord in her strange mind.

"Damn innocence!" she said at length.

"Don't," he said quietly; "it damns itself soon enough."

"Ah! you mean——"

"I don't mean anything," he said, hurriedly rising.

"Mordaunt," she rose and put her arms, falling back bare from her loose-sleeved gown, on to his shoulders, "Mordaunt, old pal, I've got an idea!"

He looked into her eyes, saw all the wrinkles, powder, paint, saw it all; he had no illusions about her.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, not unkindly.

"Roly's sick of her innocence, I'm sick of her innocence; who cares a curse about innocence?"

"Speak out; what is in your mind?"

Did Nettie, even Nettie, redden a little under the paint?

"Nothing; but," her tone was significant, "it won't last long."

Mordaunt put her arms from about him.

"What will you do, Nettie?"

He wanted to hear, he wanted to assure himself again just how base a woman could be.

"I will, I will," she answered, mocking him, her spirits rising at some thought that was shaping itself, "I will do—nothing. I will let her run loose. I will be a more lenient stepmother." She laughed; Mordaunt thought it a hateful laugh. "Roland would soon cease to be so proud of his daughter if, if . . ."

"If she goes wrong." He finished her sentence. "And you intend not putting any obstacles in her way should she have the inclination, making opportunity for her perhaps?"

"That's it, you've hit it! I'll give her her head, a hint or two."

Nettie grew thoughtful; there was another pause.

"Well?" he said.

He was curious, he wanted to know what lengths she would go to, this tiger-cat of a woman, whose jealousy was directed so bitterly against the girl who had the misfortune to be her stepdaughter.

"Well—nothing," she answered.

The hot fit had passed away; Nettie could only be spasmodically, not deliberately, villainous.

"You will try and corrupt the girl as quickly as you can. If she tries to climb out of such a morass as this, you'll give her a shove back, that's all, isn't it? What villains you women are!"

He flung away the cigarette ; he was stirred by some emotion that was strange to him.

Nettie looked at him in astonishment.

"What is villainous about it ? I am not going to do anything ; I am going to let things slide, that is all. You know what her mother was, don't you ? To listen to Roly you'd think she was the Virgin Mary. He only does it to annoy me. See what he'll say when she opens those kitten blue eyes of hers. . . ."

"Quite right, quite right," he said quickly. "Girls have no right to get themselves born in Bohemia. I don't know that anything better could happen to her than to get over it all quickly, the disgust, and scruples, all that sort of thing. She will enjoy herself more afterwards ; she doesn't look over-happy now, poor little devil ! Get it over as quick as you can, Nettie. Command me, if I can be of any assistance to you. I'm off." He took his leave abruptly. "I hear that brute Antonelli's voice in the hall. Good-bye ! I suppose I must wish you luck with your wooing or her wooing, or both. It's a rotten world."

Nettie, too, had heard the voice of her latest hanger on. She examined herself critically in the fancy hand-mirror lying on the mantelshelf, adding a necessary touch of powder quickly. Lucilla became at once of minor importance.

"Do I look all right ?" she asked him quickly.

But he was gone before he had time to answer. He got into the air as soon as he could ; it seemed

to him he could not breathe much longer in that room. He had no delusions about Nettie, nor, for the matter of that, about any woman. But to listen to her this afternoon, to hear so foul a purpose voiced so calmly ; to see her so untouched by it that at Antonelli's entrance she could forget everything she had said or hinted, go on with her old flirtations and exert her well-worn fascinations sickened him. Lucilla's flower-like face was for a moment before him. It was horrible to see how anxious this woman was to wipe out the childishness of the flower-like face !

Mordaunt knew as well as Nettie did that it could not last long ; he had put it all into words for her. Nothing pure or virtuous could last long at 200, Southampton Row.

That evening at the Cormorant Club his talk was more bitter, more cynical than ever. Roly was there applauding two burly prize-fighters who were giving an exhibition of their skill. Roly was half-drunk as usual, talking as fast as he could, weak and muddled and vicious ; never had Mordaunt felt so bitter a contempt for him, or for himself, because this man was his most intimate friend.

The face of the girl-child, a girl-child with Roly and Nettie for father and mother, began to haunt him. He actually avoided Southampton Row for the next week or two, in order to calm his feelings, and restore himself to his normal state of indifference to vice and virtue, and all that makes up the difference.

CHAPTER VI

LUCILLA went with her father to a picture-gallery, and the excursion was a failure, as all their excursions together had been failures. They had been to the Society of British Artists, and it was the time when James Whistler was president of that respectable institute. Lucilla's uneducated eye was unable to see through the mistiness of Whistler into his genius, and Mr. Stott, of Oldham, had been little better than a nightmare to her.

Her father had seemed disappointed at her want of enthusiasm. In point of fact, Roly had not found her companionable, and it was very patent to the girl that this was so. She wept over it when she returned home to the solitude of her room; the habit of weeping was growing upon her.

She was so desperately lonely, this young and pretty girl, lonely when with her father, lonely in the gay company in the drawing-room; she felt herself always different from other people, apart.

She felt she was of no use to anybody, not wanted anywhere, and she craved desperately, as a girl will crave, to be something to somebody, to occupy a niche of her own, instead of being out in the cold.* It is a dangerous state of mind for a girl to be in, for she is apt to think

any niche will fit her, to take refuge in any one that is near.

This was the state of Lucilla's mind on the first night of "Faust" at the Lyceum. She had a nice dress to go in, one of Nettie's selection, for Nettie, since that talk with Mordaunt, had ordered her clothes, and Lucilla had no voice in the matter. The dress for that night was black; it was cut very low, exposing her white slender neck, making her blush all to herself before the glass, as she tucked her chemise into her stays and adjusted the narrow straps that had to serve for sleeves.

A Lyceum first-night presents certain features that distinguish it very materially from a first-night at any other theatre and it was a mark of Roland's consideration for Lucilla that he had arranged it should be her first experience of the theatrical world. The vehicles outside were aristocratic, the excitement within was decorous and suppressed. There were a few empty seats, for so careful is the management in the distribution of tickets that some remain undistributed to the last and to allow payment for these at the door would detract from the valuable advertisement of the exclusiveness of the function.

There is a marked absence of those professional ladies usually to be found at first nights and matinées, and in their place are many clergy other than those attached to the "Church and Stage Guild." The yellow heads and bare shoulders of the demi-monde are missing; in their stead respectable dowagers, with nodding plumes, in grandmotherly

dressess, violet or black, muster in full force. The Prince has a box with his wife and sons, a decorous family group.

Nettie, Mordaunt Rivers, and Lucilla, their entry a little late, managed to disturb two or three people who glanced at them with that cold look of disapproval which is encountered by a late comer to church.

Lucilla was uncomfortable and blushed at feeling that she was a mark for so many eyes, but Nettie enjoyed attracting attention in any way, and "respectable" people were her natural enemies, to annoy them ever so slightly a social triumph. She was noticeable and noisy in gaining her seat, standing up whilst taking off her opera-cloak, talking as she surveyed the house. It was the opening scene of "Faust," Wills's adaptation. Something went wrong with the machinery, and the confusion on the stage was added to by the little disturbance in the stalls.

"Sit down, sit down," said a voice from the pit; and finally they settled into their seats.

The house was now in semi-darkness; nothing took Lucilla's attention off the stage. She forgot her low dress, and all her man's troubles; she had no eyes for anything but the play, and it was not until the curtain fell, and the house was brilliant after the first act, that she had time to observe that she was seated beside Mordaunt Rivers, and that Sinclair Furley was in the stall behind. In the excitement of their late entry, and the semi-obscurity of the theatre, she had slipped off her

cloak. She was not thinking of herself, nor of anything but Marguerite ; she was in a new and delightful world.

Sinclair roused her. They had met but once, that was on the first day she had come downstairs after her illness. Now he claimed her acquaintance and seemed charmed that she remembered him. When she recalled herself from the story that was being unfolded before her, she looked at him with interest as he bent forward to talk to her. She had heard her father say he was clever, and her father's approval was a hall-mark in her eyes. She had heard also that he could sing, and was the best dancer in London. She, of course, did not know his peculiar position in either of these arts. Also she knew that he wrote and composed, and was sufficiently unsophisticated to be impressed by this fact.

He was a man of middle height, with narrow chest and sloping shoulders, his eyes were light and expressionless, no hair grew upon his face, the loose-lipped mouth was incongruous with his leanness. His colouring was muddily yellow and this peculiarity extended to the nails of his white hands. And his hands were curiously characteristic, boneless, fat, soft, with yellow nails, they gave in their scrupulous cleanliness an impression of uncleanness.

He gazed at the young girl from under his lids in a way that made her uncomfortable, fixing his eyes upon her white and slender neck until she and it reddened uncontrollably.

"I should hardly have known you," was all he said; "I could not have conceived you were so beautiful."

Mordaunt Rivers had slipped out, Nettie was talking animatedly, and not too quietly, to the editor of a rival journal; Lucilla and Sinclair Furley were practically alone.

She tried to draw her cloak about her.

"Let me help you; but surely you would not be so cruel? You are not going to put on your cloak?"

As he spoke he helped her, touching, as he did so, her neck with his hands, showing by his face his consciousness of the act.

He appreciated her blushes and confusion, and was doubly attracted thereby. It was innocence, and that was a quality he rarely met; nor was it likely that he would, innocence being an uncommon attribute at a *café chantant*. But he recognised it here, and it excited him.

There was a poisonous suggestiveness in his manner, in his conversation. Lucilla became bewildered, alarmed. He whispered his comments on the play as it proceeded. He called himself an artist, yet he wiped out the poetry of the story and destroyed the illusion. The lights and the music and the play all became indistinct to Lucilla. She was possessed by nothing but Sinclair Furley's breath fanning her cheek; his words that she could but faintly understand echoing in her ear, that delicate ear that occasionally his lips almost touched. He seemed hovering behind her, even

when not speaking, like some unclean bird over its prey. Mordaunt, when he returned, noted his attitude.

"There won't be much of the unsophisticated left by the time Sinclair Furley has finished talking to her," he said to Nettie. "Just watch him, he is positively gloating. She seems entranced with him." But in truth she was only confused.

Nettie watched them in the next interval.

"Come home to supper," she said to the artist at the close of the performance. "A lot of men are coming; there is sure to be enough to drink, if not to eat."

Sinclair Furley had Lucilla's hand on his arm as they passed out of the theatre and he pressed it as he accepted the invitation.

"I can't tell her how gladly I will come," he whispered. "I want to see more of you; I think it is more than possible that you are my ideal, the ideal I have been pursuing since as a boy I prostrated myself before the statue of the Virgin in the chapel at home."

Lucilla's heart gave a big jump. She an ideal! She thought she disliked Mr. Furley, certainly she shrank from his breath on her neck, his words in her ear. But to be admired, to be an ideal, and the ideal of a clever man, whom her father thought great, she, poor, lonely Lucilla, who was in everybody's way!

Nettie and Lucilla went in one hansom, Rivers and Furley followed in another. They were not congenial companions. Mordaunt Rivers was at

least robust in his vices, masculine in his cynicism and contemptuousness. Sinclair was none of these things, and Rivers despised him. He even found himself thinking half-pityingly of Lucilla, exposed unprotected to Sinclair Furley's attentions.

But Sinclair Furley, who had a vanity almost childish in its complete unconsciousness, was quite unaware of Rivers's feeling for him. He talked all the way home of Lucilla, raving about her innocence and beauty. He described her as "distinctively virginal," a phrase that, although it impressed itself upon Rivers, as many of Furley's speeches did impress themselves, for he was a picturesque speaker, yet inspired him with a fresh disgust of the man who made it.

Supper after the theatre was an institution at Southampton Row ; and on such an occasion as this, a simultaneous first-night at the Gaiety and Lyceum, there was quite a representative company, representative, be it understood, of Roland Lewesham's friends and associates.

The curtains were drawn back, so that all four rooms were seen at once and there were men, smoke, loud talk and laughter in all of them. There were present a couple of women beside Nettie, women of a recognisable type. One was Lord Lusher's wife, but he was by no means the only gentleman to whom she had acted in a similar capacity ; the other was Jenny Farrell, a most popular artiste, at present resting. Lord Lusher's wife had also trod the boards. Both these ladies, as well as Nettie, hankered after the scenes of their

former triumphs or reverses and found their next greatest pleasure in seeing and criticising their successors. All three had hair of an "aureoline" hue, though with one it had to accord with black, and with another with brown, eyes. All were liberal in the display of their painted, enamelled, and gilded charms.

Supper was ready, but they waited for Roly, who was at the other play. They were filling up the time with loud talking and excited discussion of various musical comedy actresses, on the "legginess" of the new burlesque, and the poverty of its dialogue. Men and women alike were unrestrained, eager, and malicious. In their midst Rivers noted poor Lucilla, slender and child-like in her black dress, her blue eyes wondering. Then it was that Sinclair's phrase recurred uncalled to his mind. She was, indeed, "distinctively virginal."

But other things claimed his attention when at length they all sat down in the front room to the extravagant supper. The champagne was in magnums, and as they were emptied the fun and the frolic grew fast and furious.

Roland, at the head of the table, seemed to have forgotten Lucilla and his care for her. He not only drank much, but he talked incessantly, he talked himself drunk, and in this condition was at his best and most attractive, his ready wit making him a splendid boon companion. One joke after another and one anecdote after another, rolled from his lips. Rivers and the other men joined in. In this, the first stage, the conversation, though, per-

haps, it would not bear repetition, sometimes approached brilliancy; and those amongst the company who had the strongest heads carried away many a neat remark to work into their next week's "copy."

Roland Lewesham did most of the talking, Lady Lusher employing herself in making vehement love to Tom Furley, which Tom responded to in the intervals between drinking and eating. For Tom had at all times a true journalist's passion for free victuals and easy ladies. Nettie and Nellie reminiscenced, talking theatre "shop" with the three or four men who were nearest to them; and the others, of whom there were about twenty altogether, joined in the various conversations whenever they saw an opportunity.

Lucilla sat next to Sinclair Furley. Around her the laughter and the talk, the chinking of the glasses and the voice of Sinclair seemed to beat time in her brain with the slow cathedral music she had heard on the stage. When the talk veered from the more interesting event of the new burlesque to the "Faust" performance, Marguerite's peccadillo was discussed with a freedom of comment and a jocularly that may be imagined. Everyone had something to say about it; it was a fine subject for jest, and even the women joined in. Anecdotes were freely related in which different consequences had occurred, and one suggested another, until the table was in a united uproar of good stories and laughter, with easy immorality pointing each tale.

Lucilla as she listened, understanding hardly anything, yet felt her cheeks burning. Sinclair's

comments in her ear, on her delightful and refreshing innocence, seemed to her as a reproach, as sympathy ; but why or how she could not understand.

As the hours sped on, and Roland pressed the unlimited drink more warmly upon his guests, the entertainment developed into a regular orgie. It was long past midnight before a move was made from the supper-table. Lucilla seized the opportunity and went upstairs to bed.

The rooms grew hotter and hotter under the combined influence of the gas and the people. The drink went round ever more freely, and the atmosphere grew thick with smoke and license. Sinclair Furley sang a song, which he called *The Limelight Litany*, a parody of something they had heard that night but the words simply irreproducible in their blasphemous obscenity. In such a company, at such a time, it "caught on," and soon they were all roaring out the chorus. Charlie, after surreptitiously employing himself in salting Tom Furley's champagne, and betting five pounds to his nearest neighbour that he wouldn't notice it at this time in the evening, put his feet up on the table, and announced his intention of playing them an accompaniment on the mahogany, which he proceeded to do with his heels, to the detriment of the glasses, but to the great enjoyment of the company, including the host, who laughed the louder as more of his crockery became broken.

The Limelight Litany was sung again and again. In the midst of it Tom discovered his wine was salted. Truthfully, however, Charlie may be said

to have won his bet ; for it was only after drinking it off at a gulp that the laughter and cheers of the other guests drew his attention to the trick that had been played upon him.

How the evening finished with a boxing-match between Charlie and Lord Lusher in the drawing-room in which the furniture suffered more than either combatant ; and how they all roared when a heavy lunge from Charlie missed his opponent and brought down a couple of photograph-frames ; when a carefully-planned blow from Lusher struck a vase of flowers from a table behind him, boots not to tell. It was a gloriously jolly evening, long famous in the annals of Southampton Row, and it was seven o'clock and broad daylight before they separated. Even then Lord Lusher had to be accommodated with a bed, because, in addition to a black eye and a general unsteadiness, he had become obstinate, and simply refused to go.

"I don't b'lieve in going from plash to plash like you fellowsh," he hiccoughed gravely. "If I come out to supper, I shtop and shpend the evening," he persisted doggedly. And no arguments would move him.

As Tom Furley had seen Lady Lusher home somewhat earlier, he had not this responsibility on his shoulders. Eventually a bed was found for him, there was always one ready for such emergencies, and finally the party broke up, about the time the servants came down, heavy-eyed and sleepy, to exclaim at the broken glasses and disorganised furniture.

CHAPTER VII

LUCILLA awoke the next morning to a dull sense that something dreadful had happened to her last night.

She rested her aching head on her pillow, turned the pillow round to find a cooler spot, tried to put away thought and go to sleep again ; but it was of no avail. Her mouth was dry and parched, her head ached and Sarah's appearance with a cup of tea was as refreshing as daylight after a night of fever. Sarah had been Marius's attendant ; she had helped to nurse Lucilla through her illness. She was full of impatience to hear all that her young mistress had seen last night. For, of course, these orgies did not occur without the servants being well aware of what was going on, and Sarah was eager to learn from an eye-witness what actually occurred. Sarah hankered after "life," even second-hand. Lucilla's inclusion in the entertainments downstairs seemed a means of gratifying her curiosity.

"Well, Miss Lucilla," she began eagerly, handing the girl her tea, which she took thankfully, "and how did you enjoy yourself ?"

"I don't know," answered Lucilla, uneasily turning over in the bed. "I can't remember ; it

is all so confused. They said the play was no good, but I thought it beautiful."

But then some thought struck her, and she turned her face away from the inquisitive servant.

"And did anyone say as how you looked nice?"

"I wish you would go away and leave me alone, my head aches so, I want to go to sleep again. I needn't get up yet. I will tell you all about it later."

Sarah withdrew in a huff, her baffled curiosity unsatisfied.

But Lucilla could not sleep; she began to think instead. She remembered Sinclair Furley had said she was beautiful; she tried to take pleasure in the thought, but could not. His looks were looks of admiration, yet under the bedclothes she shuddered at the recollection of them; she felt hot as she thought of his hand on her shoulder, the recollection of his knee at the supper-table as it had accidentally touched hers. She was hot and cold in turns, miserable and degraded, yet could not find a reason or meaning for her sensations.

She was such a child in years and such a child in education, she was so little soiled as yet by what she had seen or heard that she did not even know why she detested the remembrance of Sinclair Furley. And yet she loathed him, wholesomely, if childishly.

She tried to reason herself out of the feeling, tried to take pleasure in his admiration, saying to herself that he had perhaps fallen in love with her! According to the scarcely assimilated code, not

only of Nettie and her friends, but also of Sarah, she ought to have been proud of having a lover. But she was not proud ; she was low-spirited and wretched.

She shed a few tears in bed, and Sarah, when she came up again, found her depressed. She tried to confide something of what she felt to Sarah ; but Sarah, not in the least comprehending, for such feelings as Lucilla's were impossible to her, administered consolation by telling her the depression was only the after effect of the glass of champagne she had drunk at her father's bidding. When she hinted that she did not like being made love to, Sarah laughed at her, and told her she would soon get used to that.

"And who was it ? " she asked, her busy fingers hooking a recalcitrant bodice, for Lucilla's new clothes all required assistance in their donning.

"Mr. Sinclair Furley," answered Lucilla, in a melancholy tone. She would have liked to be proud of her new acquisition, but could not disguise that she was not.

"The dancer ? " exclaimed Sarah, evidently disappointed. "I wish it had been Lord Lusher. Why, they do say he is heir to a dukedom, and he gives away more than anyone who comes to the house. It's a sovereign here and a sovereign there with him, and loose money in his pockets as he never counts, when he stays in the house. Your actors and your writers are a mean lot. I'm sorry it's one of them."

Lucilla only sighed again.

Unfortunately she had no duties to perform, no work to do. In that disorderly, strange household no one had any duties ; pleasure was the objective of the empty days. When that failed, neuralgia and chloral, drink and discontent filled up the spare time.

So all day Lucilla wandered about the empty drawing-room, still showing signs of last night's scenes, or into the dining-room, still reeking with the fumes of stale tobacco. She searched in the library for a volume of poems of which Sinclair Furley had spoken, and at length found it hidden behind others on the library table. Then she put herself into an armchair in the small inner room and began to read, and as she read she forgot her weariness, she was charmed with the warm and glowing words.

Remembering that Lucilla had read nothing, know no poetry except a portion of "Samson Agonistes," prepared under her governess's direction, and Shakespeare's historical plays with copious addenda, it is not surprising that she was charmed by these verses.

They were written when Sinclair's friend, De Gazet, was a young man, and they were all about love. He had a certain faculty for appropriating cleverly other men's ideas. As one genial critic remarked of the book :

"It is an admirable book of quotations, but would be more valuable if the names of the various authors had been inserted."

One poem there had been in the book that might

have made her admiration less, and her other sensations return, but fortunately it was no longer there. Mordaunt Rivers, wanting it one day for reference or quotation, had cut it out coolly from its place. It was this poem that had caused the prosecution of the English publisher of the book, a matter that had a short time since caused a sensation in literary circles. Recommending the unexpurgated book to Lucilla displayed again the bent of Sinclair Furley's mind. There is no use disguising that, with the gift of expression and many talents, Sinclair Furley was cursed with an unclean mental stratum, and all things he touched were disfigured thereby, though he had attained by the same means a certain reputation, and a circle of admirers who found in him an echo of their secret thoughts.

Lucilla read and dreamed until the day waned. She sat alone until about four o'clock, when Mordaunt Rivers, looking no worse for his last night's dissipation, came in.

"None of them up yet?" he asked the girl carelessly.

Up to now he had taken but little personal notice of her. But Sinclair's admiration and his manner of expressing it again recurred to him as he saw her sitting there so childlike and so lonely. And Lucilla, in her mood, half physical depression from late hours and unaccustomed excitement, half mental exaltation from the exotic poetry on her lap, was glad to have a companion, whoever he or she might be.

"No, none of them," she answered, looking at him anxiously to see if he were shocked at such eccentric hours; "but I think they are getting up now, for Mrs. Lewesham's bell rang some time ago."

"Well, never mind, you must entertain me until they appear. I have some work to do with your father when he does come down. How did you like 'Faust'?" he asked indifferently. "I suppose I may smoke?" he added.

Lucilla looked down, and then up again. She had often vaguely wished that Mr. Rivers would talk to her but now the moment had come she was nervous and ill at ease.

"I don't know."

"You don't know? Well, that is strange, not to know if you liked the play or not! And what are you reading?" he asked, taking the book off her lap.

"De Gazet's poems! Bah!"

He dropped it quickly, and made an expression of disgust.

"And what do you think of our great realist?" he asked curiously, after a slight pause.

"What is a realist?" questioned Lucilla timidly, ashamed again of her ignorance.

"A realist," answered Rivers gravely, "as De Gazet proves, and Sinclair Furley recites or dances or sings is a person who writes or acts subjects which more decent—I beg your pardon, my definition is wandering—of which less artistic people scarcely acknowledge that they think. A realist, according

to the present acceptation of the term, is a scavenger who finds the subjects of his labours in details which modesty covers up and police regulations banish from public places."

Under this definition Lucilla remained a moment silent, and Rivers, making no allowance for her ignorance, read a protest into her silence.

"You don't agree with me?" he asked.

"I don't know; I don't know anything," she said, rising, in an agitated voice. "I believe you are laughing at me; I don't know whether you are in earnest or in jest. Half that you talk about I don't understand, and nobody ever helps me."

She struggled to keep back her tears. She looked so helpless and bewildered that Rivers found himself sorry for her.

"Poor little devil!" he said under his breath.

"Poor little Babe in Bohemia! Don't run away," he went on, holding out his arms to prevent her passing him; for now she wanted to get away and cry unrestrainedly. "I can't be left by myself. If you will tell me what you want to know, I will tell you, really, without laughing at you. Don't go."

And Lucilla sat down again.

"But I want to know everything," she said despairingly; "everything is so difficult."

Mordaunt Rivers stood up by the mantelpiece and began gravely to cross-examine her.

"You can read, I believe?" he said.

"You are only going to make fun of me!"

"Do you read *Footlights*?"

"I have looked at it once or twice, but I don't

know any of the people alluded to and yet they seem to be all celebrities. Everyone must know them but me, or you would not write about them."

"Certainly not," he replied promptly. "So you read the *Guzzler's Gazette* for instruction, and find yourself puzzled to identify the 'Skipper' and the 'Poetaster,' 'Sir Reuben' and the 'Man of Iron.' You are indeed in pitiable circumstance. I must speak seriously to your father."

"I have only seen two numbers."

"And you did not understand those?"

"No," answered Lucilla simply. "There were anecdotes on the front page, and nursery-rhymes with the strange spelling; but," she added truthfully, "I don't think I even understood those thoroughly, for I did not think them funny, and, of course, they were meant to be."

"That is harsh criticism," said Rivers, a gleam of humour in his gray eyes. "Really, Miss Lewesham, you are very hard. Don't you know that we make our living by these despised jokes?"

"Are they really good?"

He examined her questioning countenance carefully.

"You won't betray me if I tell you something?"

"Oh no!" she answered eagerly.

"Well, my private opinion is they are most of them very bad jokes; but the public read them, and buy the paper, and seem to enjoy it. So we go on printing them."

"It is very strange," said Lucilla thoughtfully.

She looked very pretty as she gazed into the

fire, which returned her attention by throwing red glances on her cheeks and hair, and burning an unwonted depth into her wondering eyes. And Mordaunt Rivers, admiring her idly, felt vaguely sorry for her, as one is for a large bunch of grapes hanging from the vine with all its beautiful bloom upon it. One knows the fruit is only enjoyed when it has been cut down and the bloom brushed off, but all the same one can be vaguely sorry without undue sentimentality. Mordaunt Rivers saw no future before Lucilla but this, and for a moment or two watched her silently. But he too liked grapes.

"Whom do you prefer," he asked her with curiosity, "Sinclair Furley or me?"

"I don't know either of you very well," answered Lucilla hesitatingly. "But I think you only despise me and my ignorance; and Mr. Furley"—here she paused and blushed a little—"adores me!"

And then she raised her blue eyes in troubled candour. "I don't like being laughed at, despised. I know I am ignorant."

"Not so innocent, after all," was Rivers' unspoken and erroneous comment on her ingenuousness, and he changed his tone.

"Nobody could help admiring you. But you have not told me even now which of us you really like best. Must you be admired, I'm quite ready to do it if that is the only passport to your regard. Tell me."

With a sudden impulse, for which he had neither reason nor excuse, he flung an arm about her waist.

“Come, tell me. I’ve half a mind to kiss you. What would you say to that?”

Seeing the bearded head so near to her, Lucilla drew back in sudden fear.

“No, no!” she said, trying to get away.

He would have kissed her, for her resistance tempted him even more than her fairness. But the apparition of an amazed Nettie between the curtains made him release her quickly, even feel awkward, although he smiled at the newcomer satirically.

Lucilla, glad to be released, rushed from the room, her mind in a whirl of excitement, this time not quite unmixed with pleasure.

CHAPTER VIII

“WELL?” said Nettie sharply. “What does this mean? What game are you playing at now?”

“At your service, madam,” replied Mordaunt courteously, with a bow. “I hope your ladyship has had a good rest and awoke in good spirits?”

“What on earth were you doing with that child?”

“I was just about kissing ‘that child,’ when your untimely entrance balked my proud intent.”

“It’s perfectly sickening!”

“Quite the contrary, I assure you.”

“I always understood you hated that kind of thing.”

“I met Sinclair Furley this morning, and he was raving about the sweet Lucilla and her unapproachability. In your interests, and to gratify my own curiosity, I endeavoured to find out if his definition were correct.”

“What bosh!”

“It is rather bosh,” he said, changing his tone, and flinging himself on ‘the sofa. “Give me a drink, there’s a good woman, and exert your powers to soothe me after my exertions. I want drink, I want smoke; thus will I brase from my memory the milky and watery charms of the reluctant maiden.”

"Reluctant!" retorted Nettie; "she did not seem to me to be very reluctant."

Nettie was evidently angry.

"You must give her a lesson in how to appear gracefully coy. You see, it is difficult to express that sentiment otherwise than by 'struggling.' Now 'struggling' is unbecoming and inconvenient, besides defeating one's object. It is absolutely impossible under such circumstances to enjoy at one's ease 'the chaste salute of yielding lips,'" sneered Rivers, stretching himself.

He was keenly conscious of the difference between the girl who had just left him and the woman who was claiming his attention; he was always quite safe, however, in sneering at Nettie, because it was a language she did not understand. To swear at her, or to hit her, were the only two ways by which she could be brought to comprehend that you were not delighted with her. Roland frequently employed the former method; but since her childhood's days nobody had tried the latter.

She resented the scene she had interrupted by sulking, and being grossly rude to Rivers. She looked upon him as part of her, her estate, resenting any interference with her right to him; more than she did a similar aberration on Roland's part. She was less accustomed to it.

Her sulking and rudeness had their natural effect. Mordaunt Rivers was no Tom Furley, no mere "hanger-on" whether insulted or not, for the sake of the material good he might derive. Mordaunt frequented Southampton Row because

the life there suited him, because there was the tie of an old intimacy between him and Nettie, because his daily work necessitated constant communication with Roly. But none of these motives, nor all of them combined, prevented him from bidding his hostess "good-bye" after half-an-hour spent in trying to assuage her wrath. And perhaps he did not try very hard, for the contrast was so strong that he could not keep his thoughts from wandering to Lucilla. In every denial he made to her accusations, implied or spoken, there lurked a sarcasm that he was unable to restrain.

He had been used to Nettie and Nettie's ways for a long time, but this afternoon she seemed to him both ill-tempered and spiteful. He had seen her often before in such a mood, yet never had he been so critical of her.

As he went away he almost vowed he would give up Southampton Row altogether. He said to himself that Nettie was growing old and dull, Roly drank more than ever, and as for the way he allowed that girl of his to be brought up, why, it was simply disgusting !

They were strange thoughts for Mordaunt Rivers ; the " Failure," as he was called in that cheery personal column of *Footlights*. Very strange thoughts !

" What on earth makes you so glum to-night ? " asked Roly of him a few days later, when they met at Tessie Gay's birthday-party, an annual entertainment that left Southampton Row empty. And he had no explanation to offer.

Tessie Gay lived in a little house in Alpha Terrace,

St. John's Wood, a little house lying back from the road, with a garden in front of it. To-night the long, low drawing-room was crowded with men in evening dress and women in none, or, any way, in as little as fashion allowed. There were women with teeth gleaming out of red gums, lounging women with kohl-bedaubed eyes, flashing, defiantly inviting. Tessie herself was in scarlet, the dimples for which she was famous playing about her smiling face.

There was music and dancing, not very elegant dancing, romping, kissing, larking of every description. The flaring gas-brackets at the sides of the room gave out an overpowering heat. A music-hall artiste; Tessie, be it remembered, was the star *par excellence* of the music-hall stage; assisted the occasion by a few verses that had been expurgated from her most popular song. Smoking was allowed, and all manners of drink were brought into the drawing-room.

It pleased the versatile Tessie to-night to lavish all her smiles and dimples on Roly. Mordaunt, with Lucilla in his mind, watched her father, half intoxicated, with his arms round Tessie's waist, caressing with his ungloved hands Tessie's bare back, receiving a playful slap on the face when it pleased his fair hostess to resent a caress she had invited.

In the midst of the fun and frolic, the news ran round the room that Tessie's people had come up from the country to wish her many happy returns of the day. Tessie's people! Fancy Tessie with

people of her own, Tessie Gay ! Everyone streamed into the hall to see Tessie's people.

In the hall waiters were hurrying to and fro with laden trays to the supper-room—trays laden with glasses and silver, capons and hams, quails in aspic and decorated tongues. The hall was brilliantly illuminated, and all up the staircase hung the gleaming Chinese lanterns ; more of them could be seen through the open door amid the green trees of the garden, lining the pathway up to the house.

It was a very festive scene, lacking nothing that money could supply. Curiously set in such surroundings seemed the group, resting weariedly on the chairs hurriedly fetched from the dining-room by one of the waiters. They were two wholesome heavy-looking country people, a big bearded farmer, and his rustic homely wife, buxom checked, but bearing a more than faint resemblance to Tessie in her grosser charms.

" Ben and I thought we'd give you a surprise, knowing it was your birthday ; not knowin' as you 'ad friends, and 'ad done so grand in the public line," began the woman, looking round her with unfeigned admiration.

She had a baby in her arms, a fat and appetising baby. It crowed happily at the admirers that crowded round.

" There ; look at 'er," said its mother, holding her up. " One 'ud think it knowed its auntie. But Tom was the baby when you was down 'ome last, and he's seven come Michaelmas. She thinks you're

like her Ma, don't you, my precious. Me and Tess was always thought to be alike," she said to anyone who was listening.

Tessie, amid the laughter and encouragement of the men, took the baby in her arms. The baby smiled up in her face. Then, seeing the bare blooming bosom, and knowing, poor little rustic baby, but the one cause for such exposure, she pursed her sweet lips, and began to seek, in the blind groping way babies have, for its evening meal. When it resented its disappointment with loud-voiced wail, the wail was drowned in the roars of laughter and applause from the men. Mordaunt alone did not laugh, and then it was that Roly had commented on his glumness.

"What's the matter with you, man?" he asked him. "It was the funniest thing I ever saw; the little beggar thought it was——"

He went off into peals of laughter.

Mordaunt turned on his heels, his lips tightening a little under his moustache. He had had enough of Tess and her party and went out into the night. The incident, small, trivial, ludicrous, had touched him. What did such a woman as Tessie Gay do with a baby at her breast? The jokes of the men, and the laughter of the women, were as repugnant to him as had been Nettie's way of speaking of Lucilla.

That kiss he had not had haunted him. There was no affected modesty in the way Lucilla had resisted him, no mock bashfulness in the quick blush. She had been timorous, frightened, frightened

of him ! Poor child, poor child, whom Roly had abandoned to Nettie's care, whom Nettie would betray so gladly to the blandishments of Sinclair Furley or any other brute that haunted the house.

He took a vicious pleasure in vilifying Sinclair Furley the next few days, and even went out of his way to criticise that gentleman's latest performance in an evening paper for which he occasionally worked. Sinclair was now giving at one of the halls an entertainment somewhat on the lines of the *Footlights* column. It was a medley of French and English, full of double meaning, yet capable of an innocent explanation, which he carefully gave after every song and speech, pointing out how easily mistakes might have arisen and his audience misunderstood him to mean so, or so. Mordaunt slashed into this, and exposed it with a will ; in fact, so effective was his protest that the turn played to full houses for more than a week. Then he took a fortnight's holiday, during which he did the racing notes for the *Guzzler's Gazette* and gradually forgot his distaste for his friends, and the interest he felt in Lucilla.

Meanwhile, Lucilla pursued wearily the daily rounds of her empty life, striving to win affection from her father, toleration from Nettie. She thought much of Sinclair Furley and more of Mordaunt Rivers. The one had called her his "ideal," had gazed at her with admiring eyes. And he was clever, she had heard her father say that Sinclair Furley was amazingly clever, and the nearest approach to a genuine literary man that

Ireland had produced for two centuries. He was also a dramatist, and wrote verse. She tried to feel proud of his admiration, but an uneasy, nameless feeling stopped the pride, and she felt again the touch of his limp hands, and met the gaze of his lack-lustre eyes.

But Mr. Rivers ! When she thought of Mordaunt Rivers her heart would beat and the colour come unbidden to her cheeks. His hands were not limp ; he had put his arm around her waist, tried to kiss her. She would recall that moment again and again, always with an added heart beat, a delicious apprehension.

"Come with me to the McDougals, Roly ? Mordaunt is out of town and I have no one to take," asked Nettie one day.

"I'll see the McDougals damned first !" was Roly's reply, "and then I won't. I'm going to the Troc to hear Tessie's new song. Take Antonelli ; it's the sort of show will just suit him."

Antonelli was a young foreigner (from White-chapel) with a fine voice and a greatly exaggerated notion of *Footlights*' influence in the world of art. He made florid love to Nettie as a means to secure that influence and Nettie encouraged him with all the eagerness of a woman who knows her charms on the wane. But Nettie studied the conventionalities sometimes, she had the secret yearning for respectability possessed by all outcasts from it, and the McDougals gratified her ambition by their invitation.

She would not go there alone with Antonelli ;

and decided on taking Lucilla. Sinclair Furley was also going, and might be relied upon to relieve her of the girl. Nettie was more anxious than ever to get rid of Lucilla since she had discovered Mordaunt in an incipient flirtation with her. Nettie was not really jealous of Lucilla as far as Mordaunt was concerned, for she knew by experience his tastes did not run in the direction of innocent children; but the girl bored and reproached her silently. In the midst of her engrossing flirtation with Antonelli she found time to wish Sinclair Furley were a little bolder, and to make up her mind to give him a hint.

CHAPTER IX

THE McDougals lived in Savile Row. Their house was an odd one, an architect's freak, unlike any other in the vicinity. It was a double-fronted villa, the drawing-room lying on one side, the dining and consulting rooms, the latter with double doors of thick baize, on the other.

The drawing-room, low and long, was as characteristic in its way as the consulting-room. McDougal was a *dilettante* in art as well as in music and medicine and doors, walls, and mantelpieces bore specimens of his skill, plastic or graphic. The room was lighted from the sides with candles, variously shaded; fairy lights, surrounded with flowers, stood on shelves and brackets.

The room was already full when Nettie and Lucilla, accompanied by Antonelli, made their entrance, full of an odd company.

The McDougals were lion-hunters, but from the appearance of the room they seemed to have succeeded only in capturing a species of a fierce domestic cat. A cursory survey showed the men, long-haired, their dress-coats with velvet collars or silk, their shirt-fronts embroidered or frayed at the edges, their faces wearing an eager or expectant look. This expectant look was not, as might be

imagined only for the charms of supper, but also of a desire to be invited to display their respective accomplishments of playing the violin, zither, or other instrument, of singing, or, worst of all, of reciting. The women, on the same cursory glance, seemed to lack youth, freshness ; other charms they possessed were displayed with liberality. Here were well-known ladies who had held good engagements at London theatres, but who had lost them through misfortune, incompetency, or for other reasons, and many of those hybrid creatures who hang between the amateur and professional stages, sometimes playing leading parts for fees varying between five guineas and twenty guineas, at others accepting with alacrity a regular engagement in a very minor capacity for thirty shillings or two guineas weekly. There were other women whose careers had been perchance doubtful, but who, by a late marriage or an early one made public, had claims to be considered of the "whole world." Here were divorcées who had married their co-'s ; ballet girls who had espoused their protectors ; and a substratum of so-called "literary women," whose instincts led them into paths along which their plainness limited their footsteps, would-be Bohemians these, who, on the strength of an ungrammatical dress article, or a cribbed art criticism, dubbed themselves authoresses, and sought the society in which their claims to influence gave them a certain false title to attention.

The entrance of the Leweshams and Antonelli created some little stir, and Mr. and Mrs. McDougal

hurried up to them with profuse, almost gushing welcome. The doctor was a man above the middle height, burly, and blatantly self-important. He once had a considerable practice among ladies of the stage, and even others; but sick-room confidences were not respected by him, and ladies visiting him in his consulting-room found it necessary to provide themselves with an efficient *chaperone*. Stories of his conduct began to be talked about, and one more scandalous than the rest was sufficiently authenticated to provoke his professional brethren into declining to meet him. Now, though talking and even writing voluminously on certain medical subjects, his practice was reduced to occasional attendance on a few ladies whose reputations no longer required guarding.

Mrs. McDougal was a stout woman, well born, well endowed, once well looking. She had aged before her time, lines of weakness deepening into chronic lines of age and unhappiness. Her womanliness and charm had been crushed, and now she was but a worn instrument who played the tune for which her husband called. Her friends pitied her at first, and even visited her; but when first one and another of her husband's clients began to appear at her assemblies, merely respectable people thought it time to withdraw, and this process continuing, there was a very small minority now on her visiting list.

Once, and once only, had Nettie persuaded Mordaunt to accompany her to one of the McDougals' receptions. Then, after audibly making the remark

that all the "women were . . . and all the men, women," he had gone away.

Lucilla stood at the door among this crowd of professionals and would-be professionals, of men and women whose whole ambition was to be under the glare of the gaslight or behind the footlights, or wherever garish brilliancy compensated for the absence of an actual or moral daylight. They passed her, as they went in and out of the low drawing-room, or stared at her as they sat upon the convenient stairs.

Among the showy costumes her simple white dress was as distinctive as her fair child face, still with the youthful bloom upon it that no make-up can equal or imitate. Nettie, gorgeously arrayed as she was, looked meretricious and unattractive beside her.

But youth, beauty, fairness, innocence, were not appreciated in that struggling company. Nettie, as the wife of the editor of *Footlights*, and popularly supposed to "boss" that incorruptible journal, soon had a little court of flatterers around her. Signor Antonelli, the "coming man" as he was considered, although in truth he never "came" any further than to such houses as this, was also greatly sought after by aspiring hostesses. Dr. McDougal pressed him to oblige the company with just one little song with a fervour positively touching, considering what a difficulty it must have been to the singer to withstand his importunity for so long.

But Lucilla had no court and nobody asked her to do anything. She stood as near to Nettie as she could get, and hoped someone would speak to

her ; she could not help feeling neglected, although it was an experience to which she was becoming accustomed. She fell to thinking to whom she would like to be introduced, looking now at one man, then at another to discover a hero who would correspond to the girlish dreams in which she had lately begun to indulge. He must be as handsome as Mordaunt Rivers, and admire her as much as Sinclair Furley. But he must be without the cynicism of the first, and without that, that indescribable quality which revolted her in the second.

Thus thinking, and feeling both lonely and neglected, her startled eyes met Sinclair Furley's fixed upon her ardently. A vivid flush mounted her cheek as she returned his bow. She felt something between gratified vanity and physical shrinking, when he came quickly to her side. He looked all the admiration and interest his expression could command as he pressed her hand in greeting.

"How delightful it is to meet you here," he began. "I have been thinking of you ever since that night at the play. Now we can have a good talk. We will find a seat somewhere quiet."

"Signor Antonelli is going to sing the 'Maid of Athens' to Mrs. Lewesham's accompaniment," answered Lucilla, in a nervous protest against his gesture that she should follow him from the room.

"You will come afterwards, then ?" he asked. "But really he is not worth listening to. I have so much to say to you."

She assented, having no excuse ready ; she felt less neglected with him beside her, less out of it.

Antonelli sang the "Maid of Athens" in his characteristic manner. It was all expression. The bearded, rolling-eyed young Jew gave out the familiar words with a thrilling unctuousness of love, an abandonment to the passionate words of the refrain that drew forth thunders of applause from his female audience. He opened out his arms as if for the heart that he asked for, and clasped them again to his breast as if with despair at their emptiness. But, alas! as the softened r's rolled out of his thick-lipped mouth, he called it "bwcast," and above the delicious pathos rang the yet more melancholy circumstance of a defective upper register.

Sinclair drew Lucilla away when he had finished and she went with him not altogether reluctantly. The high-strained sentiment of the song touched her. She had an unconscious longing or curiosity to find out the secret of such a passionate love. She did not know that Sinclair Furley was the last man in the world to teach it to her, though perhaps she dimly divined it. They found an unoccupied lounge on the landing outside the bedroom door.

"At last," he said with a sigh of satisfaction, "we are alone!"

For a few moments he said nothing more, but contented himself with looking at her intently. Lucilla began to be uncomfortable with him now as she had been uncomfortable with him before.

"Talk to me," he said at length. His voice was soft, *trainante*, but there was in it some of that colourlessness that characterised his whole person.

"I must know what you do, what you think. Do you dance? I am sure you dance."

"I—dance!" stammered Lucilla, startled at the suggestion. "Oh no; I am sure I could not."

"I am sure you are quite clever, and that you would make a dancer. One can express every emotion with the legs, the body. I am a good judge, and I see in your walk that you have an expressive body. Did you ever hear Margaret Taylor? I invented her, I told her she could sing, and she sang, and had an enormous success. I could do more than that for you. You must let me give you lessons in dancing. We will get up an entertainment together, you shall be the *ingénue*. 'The Dancing Lesson' we will call it. It will make a great sensation; it has never been done before; not in public."

"But I cannot dance," she objected, colouring as she spoke; he noted the meaningless colour and misunderstood it. "I don't think I should like to dance in public!"

"I am sure you would be an immense success." He looked at her more definitely. "Why was that beautiful figure given to you if not to show? Tell me, shall we do this entertainment together? I will help you in every way. You know I am the only Englishman who has ever made a *furor* in Paris with his dancing. But you must be entirely candid and unrestrained with me. Tell me, how many men have you kissed?"

"There was my father," faltered Lucilla, feeling exceptionally silly, disingenuous, embarrassed. Her cheeks grew hot and her head drooped. She did not

want to answer. Only one missed kiss occurred to her ; but of that one she could not speak.

Two men, one of them Sinclair's brother Tom, were leaning against the banister beneath them ; the other was a newly-elected member of the Cormorant Club who had written an unsuccessful play.

"Your brother is going it," he said. "Who is the pretty little maiden ?"

"Roly Lewesham's daughter. Pretty little flapper, isn't she ? but too mawkish for my taste. She is by way of being innocent and unsophisticated, and all that sort of thing, don't you know. Mordaunt Rivers calls her 'The Babe in Bohemia.'"

"I should think she stands a chance of not retaining her innocence very long with your brother as guide, philosopher, and friend."

"Which only shows how little you know Sin. Men who boast about their knowledge of women never get anywhere with them. I don't know a fellow, at least, not in our lot, with whom a flapper is safer than with my brother. He is the sort of fellow who will sit all night long at a woman's feet talking about kissing her and never have the pluck to get up and do it. Nobody knows old Sin like I do. He has the reputation for being a perfect devil among women, and he likes people to think that of him. In reality he is a mere *blaguer* with a taste for indecency."

Then they passed on to other topics, but Tom had given a pretty correct diagnosis of his brother's gallantries. Lucilla, however, could not know Sinclair's weakness. She only knew that he was making

love to her, and that it was not altogether a pleasant process. He was really as much in love with her as it was in his power to be with anybody and he was perfectly charmed with his own sensations, quite determined to put them to some artistic use. In the meantime he suggested there should be between them a friendship, an intimacy of intercourse, such as Dean Swift's with Stella, Chopin's, Alfred de Musset's, Heine's with George Sand. His jejune temperament did not need any convincing of her talents. Such a friendship as he was contemplating necessitated talent on both sides, a supplementing and completing talent. Lucilla in vain denied that she had any terpsichorean or other ability or ambition. Her denial only convinced him that her talent must be dormant, needing him to develop it. In the meantime he continued to talk about himself, his ambition, his work.

Sinclair Furley believed in himself and enjoyed his reputation. When his performance at the halls was greeted by one unanimous howl of disapprobation from the press, he was delighted, writing explanatory letters to the editors, some of whom, being short of copy, published them. This he called "getting up a controversy," and he would insist it was the only way to succeed in being talked about, becoming known. When he had been called an "æsthete," his soul had revolted—in print, and he had explained voluminously the difference between an æsthete and a realist. Now he was planning a new entertainment and was delighted to find a listener to whom he might explain its scope.

They sat together on the lounge outside the drawing-room for a time which seemed to Lucilla well-nigh interminable. Nobody interrupted them, nobody wanted either of them. Sinclair's habit of talking constantly about himself and his works, past, present, and future, rendered him a companion of whom men fought shy; and it may be doubted whether women found in his society the charm that he imagined, although it was his unvarying plan to flatter their presumed vanity by suggesting they should dance or sing, and telling them his stock anecdote about the lady in whom he had discovered, though it was unknown to her before, a vast, and, as it proved, a productive talent.

He made love to Lucilla in his own way, that is to say, the way in which he mentally regarded all her sex; an undraped way, to express it in the least objectionable manner. It was not so much what he said or did, but what he looked and implied, that brought the frequent blush to her cheek, the feeling of discomfort and painful shyness. He talked of the show he was projecting, but he talked of it relatively. He continually stopped in his narrative to ask her if she could do this or that, or if she had ever felt like this or that. And the feelings he asked for were those she had never experienced, or, if she had, would have shrunk from expressing.

When, later on, she went in to supper with him, he pressed her to make an appointment to meet him somewhere that he might talk more of his coming entertainment and discuss the part she might play in it. He suggested his chambers, but an instinct,

not an education, for that Lucilla lacked, made her negative this. The prospect of a *tête-à-tête*, of many a *tête-à-tête*, with her tempted him. He urged her to say where they would meet, and at last the girl said she would ask her stepmother.

He took the task out of her hands. Nettie and he were fairly good friends, although he had never been her lover. Nettie's reply to his request that opportunity be given to him to meet the girl again told him with sufficient clearness that there would be no opposition to his wooing, if wooing was the word. Nettie had enjoyed her evening untrammelled by the care of the girl, and she thought she owed her freedom to Sinclair Furley. Sinclair Furley might continue to free her from a companionship that she looked upon as an espionage, and an irritation that, since she had surprised Mordaunt Rivers with the girl, had become more unbearable.

Nettie's fading charms accentuated her unwilling appreciation of the attraction of Lucilla's youth, and now she feared sometimes that if the child caught up, the manners and tone of the set she might prove a rival, even with Antonelli. It was a well-known fact that Sinclair Furley's conversation was even less decent in private than in public, that his company was impossible to a woman who respected herself. She made no effort to protect the girl from him. Lucilla must manage to take care of herself, she said callously, she was quite old enough!

An appointment was made for the morrow. Lucilla went home knowing that her long *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Furley was one of many to follow; that

he valued her opinion, and wanted it for his new play ; that he thought her clever, and believed she also could dance and sing if he put her in the way of it. And the girl felt happier as she thought that she might possess these or other unknown talents, and that through them she might become of use or value in the world. The hope, inter-penetrating her dreams that night, centred round Sinclair. It was he who would teach her. She tried hard to put from her mind that instinct of repulsion she could neither account for nor overcome. It is certain that more than three-fourths of what he said and what he implied had been utterly uncomprehended by her.

But she did not sleep well. Something there must have been about Sinclair, an unwholesomeness, mental, moral or physical, that brought back the figure of Marius. She tossed restlessly in her bed, dreaming now of one, now of another. Were they Marius's hands, soft, boneless, the fat flesh covering the roots of the nails, or Sinclair Furley's that touched and unnerved her ? Again and again they roused her from sleep.

But once, surely once, some other hands held hers ; she became conscious of another's touch. She was under the charm of smiling eyes and cynical mouth, lips that lay an instant upon hers. She too smiled in the darkness, resting at last on her pillow with that happy smile. And the god that tempts maidens brought her even brighter morning dreams before the morning dawned, dreams in which Mordaunt Rivers figured and Marius and Sinclair Furley were alike forgotten.

CHAPTER X

SINCLAIR kept his appointment punctually, arriving with a big bundle of MSS. tied up in brown paper. Nettie was in the drawing-room with Lady Lusher. She welcomed him warmly, soon, however, dismissing him to the inner room, where Lucilla awaited him. A significant look answered Lady Lusher's interrogatory raising of her eyebrows.

"What! does she like him? How can she?"

"Oh, girls are all the same," answered Nettie lightly. "Any man is better than none. I thought they might just as well meet here as anywhere else." She laughed harshly. "Roly is so particular about her that I have to mind my p's and q's."

"But I thought Sinclair Furley was such a . . . such an impossible person."

"Roly has a very high opinion of him. I think he's an absolute horror; but if she likes him that's her affair." She shrugged her shoulders.

This was not one of Nettie's good days; she looked haggard and old; her glass told her every day now how unfavourably she compared with the girl. Though she was no longer jealous of her influence with Roly, she could not put out of her mind Mordaunt's interrupted kiss. Nettie's jealousy was wide and inclusive.

She left Sinclair Furley alone with 'Lucilla all that afternoon, while she and Lady Lusher compared their experiences, talked of sin in various forms, but from their own standpoint, a standpoint wherefrom it was sin no longer, but a more or less amusing pastime. The men who came in were not invited to penetrate the inner sanctum. Sinclair Furley had the field to himself.

"At last! this is delightful," began Sinclair, waving his white hands. "To talk over one's works with a sympathetic listener, and that listener you! Can one imagine a more charming circumstance?"

Lucilla blushed with pleasure.

"Shall I read my synopsis, my scenario? or shall I first explain my motive, the idea upon which I have worked?"

"Is it a play?"

"Hardly; it is more in the nature of a monologue, a monologue with action and a second interpreter in the background. *You*, I hope! But there is a great deal in it. You will be astonished. I will explain it to you as I go on."

"Will it not explain itself?"

She was more at her ease with him this afternoon; his absorption in himself and his work drew his attention off her personality.

"Don't, don't speak like that," he interrupted, "it is Philistine. I could not have believed it of you, nothing in art explains itself. Try and follow me. I beg you to give me your attention."

Lucilla felt ashamed, although she knew not

wherein she had erred, or in what her Philistinism consisted; the word itself was new to her.

"I am sorry," she faltered, and looked at him wistfully out of her eyes that had begun to have that shrinking look in them as of an animal that knows not when the ready blow will fall. The remembrance of Marius, Roly's neglect, Nettie's ill-concealed dislike, had had their effect. Her nerves were always quivering, her self-distrust always growing.

"You can't help it, it is not your fault. Roland is thoroughly Philistine; but you must not listen to him, or to anybody, only to me. It is my art that I want to make you understand, its source, its inspiration. It is Greek. Noody has ever perfectly understood it. It is Nature, sex, humanity. *Footlights* is not art, nor commonplace stories, with plots, the aim of an artist. If you will listen to me you will learn. But you must give yourself up to it, let yourself go, exercise no restraint, that is the first essential."

Sinclair Furley was the most egotistical man in the world. He even forgot to make love to Lucilla while he talked to her of himself. And she? she sat and listened, for it was not often anyone talked to her. Sinclair Furley thought more of the effect of his work than of the work itself. He wrote his own songs, composed the music, invented the dances, but always with one ambition; to excite, to nauseate perhaps, but always to surprise, to make a sensation. In Paris he had succeeded, why not in London? He could not believe that he would

be always ignored, or prohibited. He really lacked a sense, the sense of decency.

He was vain. In his own emasculate fashion he had fallen in love with Lucilla, and he never doubted the result. Nevertheless he forgot to make progress whilst he talked of himself and the new entertainment he was projecting.

He talked for hours. Lucilla's brain grew weary, and she ceased to understand any single word he said. She had tried at first, although vainly, but now she left off trying. Posture! it was all about posture and the Greeks, but she knew no more. Daylight waned, the tea grew cold, the hum of voices in the other room ceased, but still he talked on.

At length the quiet in the next room and the growing darkness recalled him. The MSS. had never been opened, the explanation of it had taken up all the time. He was profuse in his apologies and regrets. He "hoped he had not bored her," but did not fear it, and, whilst uttering his farewells, promised to come in at the same time to-morrow and continue his elucidation of the art of the body.

At last he was gone; she heard the street door close behind him. She was again alone, in a solitude that was cheerless and cold. Beyond, through the curtains, was the empty room, with its disarranged chairs and cushions, the ends of cigars, the burnt-out ashes of cigarettes, and half-empty tumblers. Nettie, when her friends left, had gone upstairs to dress for the evening. The servants neglected to bring in the lights. The May evening was chilly and damp. Lucilla was mentally exhausted. Sinclair

had talked his art to her and she had striven to understand the technicalities of his exordium ; he had said things that had made her heart beat unevenly and her cheek flush. But the strain of listening for so long had over-tired her, she was benumbed by it, now her own voice would have sounded strange and distant to her ears. And the empty room, with its traces of a genial party, depressed her. The long lonely evening before her seemed miserable in contemplation.

After Nettie came down again and she and her father went out, Lucilla wandered through the rooms, into the dining-room, and looked out on the trees of the square, grim and stark in the still evening. The streets were empty, but through the trees she could see lights in the windows opposite, could almost hear the sound of merry childish voices. Her eyes filled with tears ; in all the world there was no one so lonely as she.

That was the mood in which Mordaunt Rivers found her when he walked in unannounced in the recognised Southampton Row manner. He had almost forgotten her—almost, but not quite.

“What, all alone ! and in the dark ? How’s that ? Where is everybody ? ”

“Nottie and father have gone out,” she faltered. Her heart had given a sudden jump when he came in, but her eyes were cast down. She did not want him to see that she had been crying.

“That is no reason the lamps should not be lit, baby ! ” he answered lightly, and, taking a match from his pocket, he lit the red-shaded lamp nearest him.

The lamplight fell on the girl's pale, troubled face ; he could see the traces of tears on her cheeks.

" You have been crying ! "

His voice was so gentle, there was such a thrill of pity in it, that Lucilla hid her face in her hands.

" No, no, I haven't," she got out. But her voice belied her.

He sat down beside her, putting his arms about her, drawing her gently to him. After all, she was only a child, and he comforted her as one comforts a child, saying " Hush ! " and " Never mind," kissing her hair, soothing her. And Lucilla allowed herself the luxury of crying on his shoulder. Then the sobs stopped ; she made a movement to withdraw, but he did not loose her. She looked up timidly, her lips tremulous, her eyes still wet ; the red light of the lamp showed him her sad eyes.

" Keep still, child ; keep still. You shall tell me all your troubles. Are they very heavy, unbearable ? "

His eyes smiled down upon her, the arms that held her were not nervous and loose as Roly's were, nor heavy and close as Marius's had been. Mordaunt held her comfortably, her head rested on his shoulder ; his quiet strength seemed to encompass her. She could rest where she was with a pleasure that was not wholly physical. Yet the eyes that could see no beauty in Whistler's pictures saw it easily in the well-cut features and brown beard above her.

" What have you been doing with yourself this afternoon to make you like this ? "

With his shapely brown hand he touched her still wet cheeks, and they reddened under the touch.

"Mr. Furley has been here," she said hurriedly.

The figure he held was so childish, the face so pathetic, that a thrill of disgust ran through him as he thought of her with the comedian; he could imagine how he would besmear her with his dirty descriptions, and gloat over her immaturity with his companions.

That sense of her unfitness for Southampton Row smote him afresh. He released her suddenly; leaving her on the sofa, walking away.

"And is he coming again?" he asked.

"Yes, he is coming often," she answered forlornly. "He wants to teach me to dance."

Mordaunt looked at her again. In the gathering gloom, relieved by the one lamp, the untidiness and disorder of the room seemed accentuated by the presence of the lonely girl. The acrid atmosphere was permeated with smoke and dust and heavy scents. And this, this was her place, the only home she knew! It was here, in this atmosphere, her womanhood must wake. But now, at this moment, she was still a child.

Abruptly, impulsively, he said:

"Come out; you can't spend the evening alone here. Get on your things, come out with me."

"Me?" she flushed. "With you!" she repeated, as if not believing what she heard.

"Yes, you, and with me. Why not? What were you going to do with yourself?" he repeated.

"They will bring me some supper presently; afterwards, I shall go to bed."

"Cheerful!" he answered. "It sounds most

desperately cheery ! Is that what you^o do every evening when they go out ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And do you sleep when you go to bed at nine o’clock, after a solitary evening ? ”

She hesitated.

“ You lie awake ? ”

“ Sometimes.”

“ And read ? ”

“ No ; I think about things.”

“ What things ? ”

He looked at her with fresh interest, pressing her for an answer. He wanted to know of what it was she thought when she was alone. Did she long for companionship ? Did she want to write, or go on the stage, what were her dreams ?

She told him presently that she often thought of Marius ; and of her father, who was surely disappointed in her, to whom she felt it impossible to be a companion ; of the emptiness of her days.

He sat down beside her as she talked falteringly and with many pauses. He put his arm about her again. How else does one comfort a child ? And she made no protest. Mordaunt’s heart swelled with pity, grew hot with anger against Roly as she talked. More than once his lips rested on her hair, her soft, fair hair, innocent of wash or dye.

“ Poor little girl ! poor little neglected girlie ! ” he said.

Now here was he, a man of five-and-thirty, and there was she, not a child, but a girl of seventeen, alone in the gathering dusk, the man’s heart full

of pity and sympathy, the girl's beating fast with the pleasure of being pitied, of being so comforted.

And it was Southampton Row, Southampton Row, where Mordaunt had drunk and revelled, met frail women, joined in orgies.

He looked at the room again; in it was concentrated the memory of many scenes. Lord Lusher made that dent in the mantelpiece when he fought with Charlie and flung him against it, that big stain on the carpet was where Tom in drunken glee had poured out a libation to the gods they were worshipping; Nettie's powder-box and hand-mirror were on the mantelpiece.

"Come out," he said abruptly; "no wonder you get hipped, sitting alone here, it is enough to give anyone the blues. Put your things on, and come out with me for a change; it will do you good."

Lucilla still hesitated.

"How many times am I to ask you?"

"But, but—ought I to?"

"Why not? We will have a little dinner together, then we will go to a theatre or a music hall. You've no idea how a little change freshens one up, makes things look brighter all round."

Nothing had been further from his thoughts than such an invitation, such an adventure when he came into the house, but now it seemed impossible to do anything else. It would be doing the girl a kindness, poor little thing! He could not spend the evening alone with her in these haunted rooms, yet he did not like to leave her alone. Poor little girl; poor little, pretty little girl!

He grew quite keen to carry the idea into execution, combating Lucilla's scruples one by one, finding the task not overpoweringly difficult.

"What will father say?" was her principal doubt. "Will he be vexed?" He mocked her protest.

"'Father' won't know anything about it; for one thing he never gets home until past two, by which time you will be in bed and fast asleep. Run away and dress, there is a good little girl; make yourself look very pretty, and don't keep me waiting longer than you can help, because I am getting hungry."

Lucilla still hesitated, but Mordaunt opened the door for her, and of course she was longing to go. An evening quite alone seemed worse than ever to her, now that she had a prospect of one so differently spent. She ran upstairs to dress, banishing all scruples, and very soon the servant came to her assistance. Rivers had sent her, having settled matters liberally on the basis of the understanding that the escapade was to remain a secret. He put all misgiving away from him. He *was* hungry, there was no reason he or she should dine alone. There could not be any possible harm in it.

Lucilla dressed with more real expectation of pleasure than she had ever before felt. This was no dream, this was reality. He pitied her, sympathised with her; he was taking her out to dinner!

She was excited, pleased, happy in the thought of the evening she was going to spend, of the kind words she would hear. She had a complete reaction

from the depression under which she was suffering but an hour ago. Nothing more ; her sex was still dormant.

Lucilla must be forgiven her imprudence in so readily accepting Rivers's invitation when it is remembered that propriety was a word she had never heard, a course of action that had never been discussed in her presence. If she felt a twinge of conscience, it was merely because it seemed to her she was deceiving her father in going without his permission. It was deceit of the class she had heard talked over and laughed at as a joke, at least a score of times. Women deceived their husbands this way, she knew that, and that it was thought humorous. Fathers she had not heard discussed.

She put on the white dress made for the party at McDougal's. She appeared before Mordaunt, already a little regretting his invitation, so shy and blushing, so thoroughly pretty, that he cast off his regrets and fears, and set himself seriously to the task of giving her a good time.

He chaffed her and teased her, in the manner one treats a child. Under the influence of his gay talk she lost her shyness and became, for the time being, as Nature intended, joyous and light-hearted.

Rivers drew her out, played with her, one might almost say, without arousing her self-consciousness or consciousness of her sex, or his. He treated her exactly as he might have treated a sister, a petted younger sister. For that evening at least his conscience need never reproach him. There was not a moment in it that he failed in playing his part.

CHAPTER XI

WHAT were Mordaunt Rivers's intentions or ideas regarding Lucilla is problematic; circumstances shaped his conduct. She was very pretty, and she lived side by side, in the same atmosphere, with such women as Nettie, as Lady Lusher, as Jenny Farrell. She touched him in a way he had never before been touched. He often felt sorry for her to an extent that interfered with his enjoyment of all things.

In going to Southampton Row this first evening of their intimacy he had no idea of seeing the girl, certainly less than none of taking her out to dinner with him. Habit led him to the house whenever he was in London. Habit was the tyrant of this man, who had no ambition beyond his daily bread. All Roly's vices, his drunken habits, his unfaithfulness, his moral weakness, Mordaunt knew by heart. He despised Roly, but had a certain liking for him, recognising that he never meant to do any harm, but only allowed himself to be swayed by every passing impulse. Mordaunt certainly did not want to hurt Roly through his daughter. At first, and for long afterwards, his only conscious emotion was pity, and a genuine desire to be kind to a Babe

who had strayed into Bohemia out of an unguarded nursery.

Her charm, and she was, and always remained, even in the bad days that came to her, both pretty and charming, scarcely appealed to him so much as the incongruity of her surroundings. Sinclair Furley's picturesque phrase that she was "distinctively virginal" made her live for him in a strange light.

"Have you been happy?" he asked, as they drove home that first night in the cab.

The glow in her blue eyes answered him.

"I have never spent such a happy evening," she answered fervently, squeezing the hand that imprisoned hers; "it was all lovely, the dinner, and the theatre, the unexpectedness, everything."

"Including my society?" he asked.

"It would have been nothing without you," she replied enthusiastically, genuinely. "I don't know why you are so good to me."

"It is probably because you are pretty."

She blushed in the darkness.

"Don't laugh at me; I know I am not pretty."

"How do you know that? Who told you so, baby?"

"I know it because," her voice sank and her cheeks paled again, "because I am like Marius; we were twins."

A dimness came over her eyes as she said it, and a fear. She held him with both hands. "Like me,

but like me for something else than b'cause I am pretty. Go on being good to me. You don't know how lonely I am."

Roly had once been moved by the appeal of Lucilla's eyes, and had vowed to be good to her. But Roly was like the sand-heaps the children build upon the beach, a fresh tide comes, and all trace of their efforts is washed away. Mordaunt Rivers was different, the cling of her small hands, the fear and appeal in her eyes touched a tender place in his heart, bruised and softened it. He had no words in which to answer her. He took both her hands in his and held them a moment to his face.

"Poor kiddie! We'll have some good times together. But you'll make many friends, better friends than I can be to you."

"I don't want anyone better," she answered quickly. "Only be my friend always, the same every day. Don't be like father," her voice dropped, "kind one day, hardly seeing me the next. Don't be like Nettie, so that when you are kind I am afraid. Don't say things to me that hurt right through here." She put her hand to her side. "Be always like you have been to-night."

"Very well," he said as lightly as he could; "we will vow a compact of friendship so perfect that nothing can undo it, nothing shake it. But now, jump out, here we are, and, fortunately, the dining-room gas is not lit. Roly and Nettie must be still out."

"May I tell father to-morrow?"

"No, no," he said hurriedly, without thinking;

"we will keep our friendship a secret. Go to bed, sleep well, don't lie awake, remember for the future I am going to look after you."

Had he kissed her then, it would not have surprised nor awoken her. She would have given him a child's kiss of gratitude for her happy evening. But he did not kiss her, for her appeal had touched him, and he meant to be kind, nothing more, to this young girl fate had thrust into his hands. Someone must look after her, he told himself,

They parted that night, before half-past eleven, after an evening spent in dining in the public room at Verrey's, and in sitting out "The Private Secretary." They had talked, though not much. He had kept up that elder brother manner, telling her what to eat and what not to eat, pointing out to her the peculiarities of the other diners and making fun of them for her benefit; helping her in and out of the cab, on and off with her cloak, petting her, and playing with her as one does with a child. He had nothing for which to reproach himself, nothing to account for his anxiety lest either Nettie or Roly should hear they had been together.

"Rum go!" said the footman when he took his *douceur* and understood its significance. "Wonder what the missus would say if she knew?"

"Well, she won't give you nothing for telling her, and he will give you something for not telling her; so it's easy to see which side your bread's buttered," answered his confidante. And, needless to add, Nettie was not informed.

Mordaunt's conscience, as he walked down the

empty street into the dreariness of Russell Square, reminded him nevertheless of its existence. He puffed at his cigarette, but it did not obscure the face of Lucilla as she thanked him, as she had said, with that innocent burst of gratitude :

“ I don't know why you are so good to me.”

She was young, fair, extraordinarily innocent ; Nettie's step-daughter, and he had himself foreshadowed to Nettie her inevitable future. But then he had not known her ; it had not dawned upon him that she was not as other girls, not as any other girl he had ever met.

“ How joyous, how childlike, how light-hearted she was at dinner,” he mused. “ What an infernal thing it is. . . . ”

He got thus far in his meditations and stopped. If his thoughts carried him further he had the grace to be ashamed.

The code of manners for young ladies was not strict in the world he lived in now, not the same code that had governed another world he had known years and years ago. Nettie would be in a fury if she heard he had taken Lucilla out to dinner, but that would not be on account of the conventionalities that had been outraged, but only because he had been her companion.

Nettie was of a very jealous disposition, and he did not intend to arouse it. But that did not prevent him, now that the ice was once broken, from showing Lucilla many kindnesses. He got into the habit of meeting her on the staircase, in the hall, as he came in and out of the house, asking her how she

was getting along, what she was doing. He brought her sweets, gave her books, certainly he kissed her sometimes.

Nettie was very much absorbed in her flirtation with Antonelli. Nettie's youth was vanishing so fast that an *affaire* was not to be missed. She dressed three and four times a day; she practised all those arts of hers that had been growing rusty for lack of use.

Sinclair Furley came often to read or talk to Lucilla, although the dancing lessons had not yet begun. Nettie felt satisfied that if the girl had a lover, and that lover Sinclair Furley, Roly would soon leave off bothering about her.

Sinclair talked and read to Lucilla, and the girl listened, or at least she was silent, and Sinclair thought that she was listening. But she could not concentrate her mind upon what he said, or read. Harmlessly his insinuations, his innuendos, words and looks passed over her. She was sunk in happy reveries. His voice hummed in her ears monotonously; he had an even, and monotonous intonation with mechanical rises and falls, rhythmic but unimpressive. The humming did not interrupt her dreams. In truth she had dreamt through all her short unsatisfied life. Of the father who would one day love her and seek her companionship, of the dead mother she had never known, of the kind grandmother she remembered but vaguely. But now she dreamed only of Mordaunt, her one and only friend, Mr. Rivers, for whose coming she was for ever looking, and who so rarely disappointed her.

The girl grew stronger in health and nerves under the influence of her new happiness. It was happiness for her to see Mordaunt, to feel assured of his friendship. She had none of the uncertainty, the hopes and fears of love.

Her friend was tolerant with her ignorance, answering all her questions; her education was really defective and Mordaunt well read, there had been a time in his life when reading was his only solace. He enlarged her mind, taught her the existence of literature. Not of the only literature Sinclair Furley knew, De Goncourt and Daudet, but something of the beauties of Horace, something of the philosophy of Plato. He found time to give her a broad survey of social history, to point out recurrent thought waves, talk of art cycles, the varying features of a shifting humanity.

There were always more opportunities. Nettie was absorbed in Antonelli, spending many evenings with him at unnamed resorts. Roly, just now, had a feverish infatuation for Tessie Gay that kept him much from home. Mordaunt knew their movements and took advantage of their absence to spend his time with Lucilla.

"You don't want to come with us to the Empire," Nettie would say; "you can ask Sinclair Furley to come in the evening instead of in the afternoon. The Empire is not the proper place for girls."

And Lucilla would acquiesce—acquiesce while the colour came into her cheek, and her heart beat fast; but Sinclair Furley never got his invitation.

"DEAR MR. RIVERS,

"They are going to the Empire to-night.

"Yours truly,

"LUCILLA LEWESHAM."

Mordaunt would get this little letter, many such letters, at his club, or at his chambers, and he would smile under his moustache.

"Poor little thing! Where shall I take her to-night? Let me see, we have been to the Court, and the Lyceum, and the Strand. It is very hot for the theatre. I'll take her to the Exhibition; good idea!"

"DEAR LITTLE GIRL,

"Go to bed with a headache. It will be too late if you wait until Nettie has gone out. Be at the corner a quarter to eight, sharp. I've got a splendid idea for this evening. Not evening dress, hat and jacket.

"Yours,

"M. R."

The footman was their sworn friend now. Lucilla got the note just before Sinclair arrived for the afternoon reading.

Poor man! his chance of a hearing was a slender one, but he had a passion for the sound of his own voice; reading to Lucilla ensured him an audience. He fully intended to teach her to dance; in the meantime it would educate her to hear the *motif* of the play; to thoroughly

master his method, to enter into the spirit of the thing. His egotism was gratified by her assumed attention, his vanity fed by the chaff he underwent from his friends at his intimacy with Roly's daughter. There was nothing he did not imply took place in those afternoon interviews. He had a habit of interpolating French phrases into his conversation, although his French was not so perfect as he imagined. He talked much, and mysteriously, of his "*bonnes fortunes*," the whole incident was to his taste.

He read and read and read, while she dreamed over the pleasures of the evening, and wondered again and again what treat Mordaunt had in store for her.

"I have been so impatient," she said when, a little out of breath, she joined him at the appointed time.

"Have you?" he answered lightly. "What a baby you are! Where do you think I mean to take you—guess?"

"I don't know—I don't care much; it is sure to be somewhere nice."

CHAPTER XII

"WHERE *are* we going ? "

"Can't you restrain your impatience until we get there ? " he answered teasingly.

"No, no ; tell me now."

"Well, we are going a little trip to Fairyland."

"Will there be fairies."

"Yes ; great big handsome men-fairies. I shall be put in the background, I suppose."

She laughed a merry little laugh.

"You are not afraid of ever being in the background with me ? " Her shoulder touched his in the hansom.

He looked down at her.

"Yes, I am. Babies are so fickle. Supposing a big fairy with a yellow moustache wanted to take you out of an evening, wouldn't you be just as delighted as you are at coming out with me ? Wouldn't you give me the slip as easily as possible ? "

"No," she answered promptly, vehemently. "I don't like yellow moustaches like Lord Lusher's, nor black ones like Tom Furley's, nor none at all, like Sinclair Furley. I like a beard. So there now ! "

She glanced at him a little shyly under her lashes. She was not seventeen but twelve to-night, gay as if she had never known a trouble.

"You don't know how they feel, baby." He smoothed it with his hand. "Beards are rough things; you had a chance of knowing once and you threw it away. Now you will never, never know."

His mood was the same as hers, they were only two children in an adventurous hansom.

"I know exactly what it would be like, it is like a broom!"

"A most improper remark," he said coolly, "and very disrespectful."

In such idle chatter they reached the Exhibition. It was the year of the Inventories. Mordaunt wasted no time on the exhibits. He led Lucilla to the grounds, where the illuminated fountains and the many-coloured lamps, all brilliant in the warm summer night, elicited from the girl divers exclamations of pleasure.

They dined at the Welcome Club at a table all to themselves by the window. The fresh air played about them as they ate, and the strains of the music mingled with their talk. There was really something charming about their intimacy. Mordaunt put away from him deliberately all thought but that of the immense and reciprocal pleasure of the moment. The girl's unconcealed delight in his company was a new sensation for him.

Wandering afterwards under the trees, within sound of the music, hand-in-hand for the most part, he encouraged her to talk of her feelings towards him. Lucilla was quite ready. She was in that delightful stage which precedes love in a

young girl's mind. No touch or taint of passion marred her thoughts. He absorbed her, but almost impersonally. She had not begun to think about him, he loomed too large, he was her Providence, not her lover. In some indefinable way he had restored her lost childhood. She was in a state of constant pleasurable expectation of, and in, and about him. He imported into the life that had been in danger of growing gray and colourless from neglect, a warmth and a brightness.

"But why do you like me so much, child?" he asked her for about the fourth time.

"I like you because you are kind to me, because you take me out, because your hands are not too warm or too soft," she pressed one between her small ones, "but just firm and nice. I like to think about you, and I can always see you when you are not there, and often I don't see anything else. You come between me and everything I don't want to see or think of. I used to be always thinking about Marius, or about my life, and that it was no use to anybody, and I was not wanted. But now—now I only think of when will be the next time you will take me out and I have always something to which to look forward."

It was all very artless and simple. Again they were sitting under the trees, Mordaunt with a cigarette in his mouth.

"But suppose Furley had had the idea of relieving the monotony of your evenings by taking you out, would you have felt just the same for him, do you think? Is it cupboard love?"

She shook her head, looking at him, out of the blue eyes softly.

"No, you are not a bit like him. He startles me sometimes, frightens me. I do not know what he is going to say ; I am afraid of what he is going to say. I don't know why, but with you I always feel safe and happy."

He flung away his cigarette.

"You feel thoroughly safe with me ? " he asked her, almost roughly.

For answer she came closer to him, and, laughing happily, answered lightly :

"Quite safe."

They were practically alone, and he flung a careless arm about her, looked into her eyes. There was no blush, no tremor, no invitation. Candidly and openly, affectionately, her eyes met his.

"And yet, and yet," he said almost to himself, "you are not so safe with me as you suppose. I may be an ogre, not a fairy at all. I don't kiss you, but I might want to kiss you, to say those things Furley says."

He was looking at her so intently, his arm was so close about her, that she grew a little nervous and tried to get free, but he held her tighter then.

"Don't ! You are hurting me !" she cried. "I don't want you to be an ogre." His face was very near her, and his eyes looked fierce, not kind.

He loosed her.

"I would not hurt you, child ; don't be frightened, I was only playing."

But his voice was unsteady.

He took her home very soon after that.

Mordaunt Rivers had never led a chaste life or a temperate one. He had lived since his early manhood in a vicious atmosphere, and had never gone out of his way to avoid temptation. But he began to feel that Lucilla was a temptation to him, and what was higher in him than his body revolted at it. Neither Lucilla's childishness nor her affectionate trust in him could prevent him from seeing the budding charms of her immaturity; could prevent pity and liking and interest from becoming something warmer at times, when, in her absolute unconsciousness, she tempted him by her caressing ways.

But there was moral strength in Mordaunt and his manliness was not only in his appearance. When he went home that evening, he vowed to himself that the girl should come to no harm through him. He would take the pleasure of her blossoming, of her pretty, loving ways, of her pleasures in pleasant things, but he would take no more from her. Her lips should be sacred from him, the heart that might be his for the asking he would not force, the bloom of her innocence he would not brush off.

Believing in his strength and ability to keep his vow he made no effort to put temptation from him. Quite the contrary.

The Cormorant Club lost its charm, the weekly house-dinner bored him, he found the Sunday evening boxing-matches brutal and coarse, but, above all things, he was daily more conscious of distaste for Nettie and Roland, for their respective

vices and mutual toleration. He saw Roly, of an evening, excited, semi-intoxicated, lounging at music-hall bars until it was Tessie Gay's turn to sing ; heard him vehemently applauding ; watched the vulgar little beauty encourage his attentions. Their coarse love-making, if love-making it can be called, revolted his taste, and he could not join in the laughter and chaff around him.

From the music-hall he would go on to Southampton Row. On the evenings she had no appointment with him, Lucilla would retire early to her happy dreams. He would find the atmosphere of the house newly abominable, when Nettie lounged in her liberal evening dress, and Antonelli, coarse-lipped, heavy-jowled, paid her extravagant and insincere compliments that she accepted avidly.

Nettie and Roly, and all the Southampton Row clique, became abhorrent to him. In this new spirit his copy for *Footlights* languished and grew dull, it was well for the paper that it was firmly established as a popular favourite. Mordaunt began to hate his work and the easy-going, bar-loafing life that had satisfied him so many years.

He was in this unsettled frame of mind when the 2nd of July dawned, a day Lucilla had been looking forward to for weeks. It was the day of Henley Regatta. Lord Lusher had a house-boat, and the theatrical party he had invited was wide enough in its scope to include both Nettie and Antonelli, Roly and Tessie Gay. Nettie had agreed to sleep on the house-boat and act as joint hostess. Mordaunt thought it a good opportunity for another treat for

Lucilla. So, curiously already had the situation developed that everything that happened in Southampton Row now led to this end, to this query: would it, or not, be an opportunity for him to meet Lucilla without comment, without anyone knowing? It was strange how he dreaded lest anyone should know of their intimacy.

Nettie, Roly and the rest of the party left Southampton Row for Paddington at 10.45. At 11, Mordaunt, neatly attired in a light boating costume, drove up in a hansom, and found Lucilla, already dressed in her white flannel and sailor hat, awaiting him in the hall.

"That's right, child; jump in," he said, assisting her. "We have twelve minutes to get to Waterloo, and there isn't an instant to spare. How nice you look! Are we not going to have a lovely day?"

"Lovely! Isn't it all delicious? I want to be on the river all day long. You know I never saw the river, except that day at Richmond, and then I quite longed to go for a row."

"Why did you not tell me? I would have managed it."

"Oh, you are always managing things for me. I don't like to be like Oliver Twist, always asking for more. But this is better than anything has ever been. A whole long day, and such a day, on the river, just you and me! It makes me feel so happy that I do not know what to say, or how to thank you."

"Do you know, baby, you tempt me so much with that constant 'I don't know how to thank

you ' of yours, that one of these days, I believe I shall find a way for you." If they had not been in a hansom he would have taken her in his arms, taught her. He did not know what was happening to him this morning? he felt reckless. She was the prettiest thing in the world, her lips were like rosebuds.

She looked at him affectionately and squeezed his hand.

"Do; I wish you would. Oh, here we are; don't tell me now, but get the tickets. I would not miss the train for worlds."

"Plenty of time, plenty of time. We have three minutes to spare. Don't jump out of the cab in your excitement. One of these days you'll break your little neck, and then what shall I do?" His self-command came back, the sudden flush passed. He would take care of her, guard her.

She was too excited to heed him, rushing on to the platform, not quieting down until they were actually in the train. Mordaunt had often wanted to take Lucilla for a day on the river, but an opportunity had been very difficult to find. It is one of those enjoyments particularly relished by the theatrical world and there was never a certainty on a fine day that Roland would not start off unexpectedly with a party. His destination, decided at the last moment, would be difficult or impossible to discover. But Roly was to-day safe at Henley. To Halliford, therefore, on this sweet sunny July morning, Mordaunt was safe in proceeding with Roly's daughter.

There are some people on whom the country has a peculiar effect, an effect equivalent to intoxication. The sweet-scented air blowing in their faces mounts to the head ; in the sun their blood begins to race. And Lucilla was one of them. From the moment she alighted at the little country station, smelt the fresh air, that her eyes saw the greenness of the trees and the lush grass, she became intoxicated with the pure delight of it all. She could barely talk, but put her hand in Mordaunt's and turned to him for sympathy whenever some scent, sweeter than another, a magnolia-grown cottage, or garden full of tall, white lilies, drew from her a long breath that was almost a sigh. Her happiness was beyond all speech, she could only look around her, drawing it in with long breaths, devouring it with her alight and eager eyes.

Mordaunt had taken the precaution to order a boat to be in readiness for them, a brightly-decorated Canadian canoe. He arranged the cushions comfortably for her, showing her how she was to sit in the middle in order to balance the crazy little craft. Then, divesting himself of coat and straw hat, he seated himself opposite and soon paddled away from the shore.

They had never passed so happy a day ; it may be doubted whether they ever again passed one so absolutely free from care. Mordaunt had brought a small picnic-basket and they lunched together in a shady backwater, Lucilla unpacking, Mordaunt helping in the subsequent washing-up. After lunch he stretched himself beside her, and began to talk.

There was not a cloud in the sky, the sun was shaded from them by the trees, but its beautiful warmth, tempered by the gentlest of summer breezes, touched them both.

"And you are quite happy?" he asked, as he lay by her side, his hat tilted over his eyes that were half closed against the sun.

"I am too happy to talk."

Her eyes were glowing. She had taken off her hat, and the fair curly tendrils of her hair were blown by the breeze, the sun showed the down on her cheeks, kissing them into warmth.

Mordaunt watched her under his tilted hat. He knew what he was watching, an innocent and sufficing happiness aroused in a motherless child by the wonderful motherliness of Nature! Mordaunt could see that he was forgotten, her eyes were filled with the lapping waters, sun-streaked and still, her ears with the sighing of the leafy trees, and the carolling of birds.

Presently he took her hand in his. She gave it to him willingly, gladly. He asked her again if she were quite happy. For a fleeting moment the surprise of her soft lips lay on the hand that held hers.

"More than happy," she said, "too happy."

They sat on for more than an hour after that, absolutely silent. Mordaunt, forgetting his worldly wisdom, his cynicism, the world he lived in, gave himself up to the pleasure of watching her rapt face, trying to follow the direction of her thoughts by her changing expression.

He, too, drifted presently into thoughtfulness. And it was she who first broke the silence.

"It is making me too sad. I want to talk, I want to get it into words, into something I can always remember."

"It ? What ?"

He was scarcely awake.

"Everything. I feel that I am trying to get closer to it, but I cannot. Nature is so beautiful, but it is so far off. I am empty of it, hungry for it, and I cannot satisfy myself. It is my mother, but she is dead, and I can feel the beauty of such a motherhood, but I cannot throw myself into her arms. I am alone in the midst of it, in the midst of everything ! I feel I shall always be alone." There was a sob in her voice, she was trembling with the emotions she could not put in words. "I can't explain to you what I feel," she said more soberly, a little forlornly. "I thought you would understand."

Rivers put his arm around her, and drew her closer to him, protectingly, soothingly. She did not resist, nestling to him rather.

"Explain it to me. Tell me what I feel ; is it as if you were hungry ?"

Mordaunt Rivers, the world-worn cynic who edited *Footlights*, was called upon to explain to the dawning maidenhood of this child the spiritual mystery of her sensations. And the peaceful spirit of the country being upon him, together with a growing feeling for the girl, he was able to acquit himself not unworthily of the task.

It was God talking, he told her. He talked in whispered parables ; that was what she heard in the sougling of the branches overhead. He spoke only to those whose ears were open to hear, to her because already she loved His works. It was afterwards the talk went from God's love to human love and each man's need of it. He forgot he was talking to a child, voicing a need of which she knew nothing, speaking his inward thoughts aloud, showing her, and himself a new, unknown Mordaunt Rivers, one as unsatisfied as the girl beside him.

It was not wonderful that he forgot his vows, drifting from the love of Nature to love of man, from love general to love particular. They talked of love, and the girl noted the gold thread the sun painted into his brown hair, the depth it added to his blue eyes. She did not resist when he drew her closer to him, when at length the bearded lips touched hers gently.

He asked no questions. She scarcely knew whether it was love of Mordaunt or love of the country that so strangely agitated her. The two became one in her mind during the rest of the afternoon, which they spent until the sun went down, sitting close together, speaking little, listening to the lapping waters, and the rustling breeze, and the reeds whispering.

Mordaunt gave himself to the hour. He knew it was a child that was beside him, so near that by a word, almost a look, he could break the spell that bound her to childhood, and see the

woman rise in eyes love-lit for him. But that word he did not speak, dared not. There was a life-time behind him in which she could have no part. This was a strange hour for him. He felt he was soiled, unworthy. Something of awe was upon him for what this hour brought, for he knew now that he loved her.

She moved him as he had never before been moved. He had in the distant past felt for one woman a violent passion that had wrecked his youth and tainted his manhood ; he had felt since then for divers women gusts of emotion that had died away quickly and left him only ashamed. He had even experienced friendship for women, women of a class to whom friendship is rare. But as he felt toward Lucilla he had never felt before.

They dined together in the small private parlour of the local inn. A sweet, pleasant dinner-hour, the river shining through the open casement, and the evening air warm and full of the scent of honeysuckle. They sat by the window when they had finished dining, and in the moonlight talked of many things. Lucilla was so happy that she seemed part of the scene, Mordaunt so content to be with her that time stood still for him.

It was a shock when the maid who had waited on them at dinner came in to say : " Please would you be wanting anything more ? Master is away at Henley, and Missus had not looked to keep open so late . . . "

" So late ! " ejaculated Rivers. " Why, what on earth is the time ? "

"It is eleven, sir."

It was past eleven, and, as he knew, the last train went at 10.47! He looked at Lucilla with dismay. In God's name what was to be done?

"The last train has gone," it was almost a groan. What on earth was to be done? To his surprise, Lucilla laughed, clapping her hands with almost childish glee.

"How splendid! How wonderful! We shall have to stay here, see the sun rise on the river. And to-morrow will be another day like to-day, only better. We shall know what the river says, and the wind in the trees. . . ."

Mordaunt was the embarrassed one, Lucilla glowing like a star at evening. The servant stood at the door and waited instructions.

"Do let us stay," Lucilla said again, pleadingly, "it will be wonderful to sleep here, wake to see the river from the window."

Mordaunt understood that she had no more idea of anything strange or out of the way in her spending the night here, in this village inn, with him, than if she had been seven instead of seventeen. He forgot that he loved her, only remembering that he had to guard her.

She coaxed him to stay, and, indeed, he had no choice. He knew Nettie and Roly were spending the night at Henley, so he did not fear her being missed at home. And he was less troubled as to what the servants might think than if she had a different home-world.

"All right, I'll manage something," was what

he said when he went out of the room. And she clapped her hands !

His arrangements were quickly made. The landlady, a kind motherly sort of woman, to whom he explained the situation in a few simple words, agreed to look after Lucilla. She told him there was another inn in the village, where he could get a bed.

When they parted for the night Lucilla accompanied him to the gate. She would hardly let him go. It was he who was uneasily circumspect, and cut the parting short, omitting even to kiss her.

And Lucilla slept happily that night, her rose-coloured dreams full of summer sights and sounds. But Mordaunt tossed about uneasily ; when he fell into a troubled sleep Lucilla's form filled his arms, or her hand clasped his. He was possessed by her, and could not shake her off. Sometimes he cursed himself for his idiotic scruples, sometimes he called himself an unutterable villain for having won the child's affections, for having so far led her from the right path. But whether he blamed himself for the one thing or for the other he was equally restless, his imagination brought Lucilla before him in his half-sleeping, half-waking state, in every conceivable and inconceivable situation. It was years since he had spent such a night, so full of mingled feelings, so unrestful. Yet at times he tasted happiness, dreaming that this sweet girl-child loved him, that he was a free man, and had taken her for his wife.

CHAPTER XIII

THE morning dawned. Lucilla, rising before the sun, threw open her window ; she gazed over the greenness of the earth with rapture. To breathe the fresh, pure air was happiness, she heard the young thrushes singing in the trees ; the river's surface shone gay, and there was a mist upon it like a gossamer veil, adding mystery to its beauty. In the distance, through the haze of early morning, the green of the trees was gray also, they seemed unreal against the sky, above them the clouds on the horizon were like distant outlines of untrodden mountains.

Once again the spirit of Nature possessed her and thrilled her into a warmth that was almost womanhood. During the day, this beautiful July day that she and Mordaunt spent again together on the quiet river, with the sun shining in bright patches on the water, and the blue sky reflected in its depth, her happiness was like a mantle about her. She was enwrapped in it, separated from him, somehow set apart. His night haunted him ; he could not look upon her any more as a child, and this new development of feeling he could not longer disguise from himself. He dared not caress her. She was half asleep, and a touch might

awaken her. Literally, he dared not touch her, only watched her, flushing sometimes, hating himself for his thoughts.

The canoe drifted with them at the sweet will of the waters, among the green flowering flags, beneath tender new branches of trees. The morning warmth blazed into the noonday heat, the noon-day heat waned into the cool of the evening.

Then it was over for them, this two days' summer idyl. Mordaunt, fully awake to the situation, would not risk missing another train. Nettie and Roly would be back to-morrow morning; they must go. Lucilla submitted to the inevitable and he turned the canoe homeward.

In the inn where they had tea he left her for a moment, and when he returned found her looking out of the window, tears wet on her cheeks. He could not bear to see her cry, it was then his strength nearly failed him. He took her in his arms. "Don't cry," he said agitatedly. "For God's sake don't cry." He felt the tide of his feelings growing higher. It needed all his manhood to keep him from saying they need not go home at all. If she would say the word she should stay here with him, stay with him always.

He did not know what restrained him; it was a proposition that a month or two ago would have seemed to him the easiest and most natural. But now he could not do it; he could not find the words in which to say it to her. It was her trust in him, the knowledge of how completely she was at his mercy that kept him silent. He formed no plans

for the future, made no resolutions, but he kept his arms around her loosely, he would not tighten them. He kissed her, but he kissed her lightly. He kept the mastery over himself even when he wiped away her tears and laughed at her for shedding them.

But he asked himself many times afterwards why he had so acted. She was Roland's daughter, Nettie's step-daughter !

They reached Southampton Row. The oppression on Lucilla's heart deepened, the sense of impending trouble seemed to be upon both of them. It was fully realised.

Nettie herself opened the door. She heard their hansom drive up and rushed out to meet them. For hours she had been working herself into this passion, barely hoping they would come here so that she might wreck it upon them. She had a mad unreasoning attack of jealousy, but, of course, she called it by another name, it was her morality that was outraged, ablaze. The girl had spent the night away from home. She had dared to come back !

Mordaunt, with one glance at her working face, realised what was coming and his first thought was how to spare Lucilla. But it was already too late. Lucilla was out of the hansom, standing beside him. Mordaunt closed the hall-door behind them both.

Nettie made a step forward, as if she would strike the girl.

" You——" she used an unprintable word. " How dare you come here ! " her voice was hoarse with

fury. Mordaunt put his arms around the shrinking, terror-stricken girl.

"Shut up!" he said harshly to Nettie; "don't make a fool of yourself; the girl is all right. We missed the train last night."

"How dare you bring your . . . into my house!" She was almost incoherent and what she said is impossible to transcribe. She barred the way to the dining-room door, and raved at them in the hall, before a limited audience of servants, who crowded up the kitchen-stairs to see what was going on.

There was not a foul name she did not hurl at the girl, who only shrunk closer to Mordaunt's side, seeking shelter from the storm whose full significance she yet failed to understand.

Her clinging to Mordaunt, her dumb appeal to him, made matters worse.

"Go out of my house," she shrieked, "the pair of you. Out with you. I won't have her here. She shan't come inside, I tell you." There was a fresh string of epithets. "Take her home to your wife if you want shelter for her; she is just such another. They will be good companions."

She stamped her foot, and even made a step towards them, as if to physically enforce her commands.

At the repetition of the words "Why don't you take her home to your wife?" Lucilla started, looking up at him with an appealing, startled glance. It was then he grasped Nettie's shoulder.

"Be quiet!" he almost shook her; "be quiet,

I tell you, don't give us any more of your foulness. I knew you were capable of it. Damn you, damn you." He was quite white, his face like a mask. "You don't know what you are saying. The girl will stay here in her father's house; it's not a fit place for her, with you in it, but she'll stay, for lack of a better. . . ." His breath was caught in his throat.

Again she shrieked that word at the girl.

"Hold your tongue." He really shook her, the look on Lucilla's face maddened him.

Nettie wrenched her shoulder free, she too was beside herself or would surely not have said the incredible things she did.

He could not shut her mouth, he could not prevent her giving vent to some of the vilest thoughts that ever disfigured the brains or lips of woman, and he could not close Lucilla's ears against them; that was the worst of it.

In the end he said :

"Very well then; I'll look after her. But you'll have to settle with Roly. . . ." He was really beyond reasoning.

He took the girl by the arm, she was trembling, out of her mind with fear, non-comprehension. Who did Nettie mean by "his wife"? Her brain was dazed with it, and the suddenness; she could hardly see before her. Everything seemed blurred and unreal, only the close smell of the house, the dust in the corners, the stains on the carpet were real. Nettie's face was indistinct, her words came from a long way off. She felt giddy, and as if she was going

to be sick. Such a little while ago she had been in another world, a green, pure, beautiful world ; where was it, what had become of it ? Now she could not see anything but darkness. She clung to Mordaunt, clung to him because the hall was going round and there was a dreadful pain in her head. She was afraid of falling ; heard herself outscreeching Nettie, her tongue was bitter in her mouth, a trembling like death shook her.

Quietness fell upon her suddenly. Nettie's and Mordaunt's faces were indistinct, and their voices had gone a long way off. Someone lifted her into the air, into a cab. Now she heard the horse's hoofs in the road ; an arm was round her, her head, heavy and dull, was resting on a restful shoulder ; she was getting better from that hideous nightmare.

Marius, her twin brother, was not then wholly dead ; that vertigo that seized her—what was it but a feeble echo of what she had seen him suffer ? Marius ! why was she thinking of him now ?

Consciousness returned slowly, imperceptibly. The cab had stopped, she knew not where ; the arm was still around her, supporting her. A door banged, some harsh female voice called out :

“ It's another of them drabs he is bringing in.”

She found herself resting on a sofa, a pillow behind her back. She tried to speak, to ask where she was, what had happened, but she could neither speak nor think clearly, her head was aching violently, and of what had passed about her, what she had seen or heard, she could not quite remember the significance.

She got better presently, sat up and looked around

her. She was alone, but she could hear footsteps in the adjoining room, the door that connected the two was slightly ajar. She was lying on a rickety sofa, a big writing-table, many-drawered, ink-splotched, and untidy with papers, was in the centre of the room, a wooden armchair in front of it, and there were a few other chairs. On the walls, hung with faded paper, were bookshelves, many books in confused and irregular heaps. Through the open window, with its dirty panes of glass, came the roar of traffic.

She had no time to notice more, for now Mordaunt came into the room :

“ Drink this,” he said. He had a glass in his hand. “ It is only *sal volatile*, it will revive you ; but you look better already.”

She did not look much better ; although some colour had come back to her cheeks her eyes were still glazed and dull. .

She drank the cordial, and Mordaunt stood looking at her in a silence that can only be described as embarrassed.

“ You feel better now, don’t you ? ” he asked.

“ Yes, thank you.”

She made an effort to rise, but he stopped her.

“ Lie still ; lie still a little longer. You are all right here, quite safe.”

“ Where am I ? ”

He took a chair beside her.

“ In the Strand, Cecil Street ; you are quite safe. That wretched woman frightened you, didn’t she ? ”

He took her hand.

Lucilla freed it, and put it to her aching head, tried to remember *what* had frightened her, pushing back her straw hat. She took it off and looked at it. It was the hat she had bought specially for the day on the river. Looking at it, memory did not seem so far off.

"Yes," she answered slowly, staring at the hat with its brightly-coloured ribbon, "she frightened me."

"You will not go back to her?" he said, not moving.

"No?" said Lucy questioningly, looking at him wonderingly. "Where shall I go? I don't know. I have nowhere to go."

She stood up, and this time she felt stronger and her legs did not tremble so much. "I must go back, I think."

He, too, stood up, but still he did not touch her. He said to her, almost abruptly:

"Will you stay with me?"

"With you?"

"With me, dear."

There was more gentleness, more tenderness than passion, in his voice, in his manner, as he drew her to him and held her. She was a child, an unprotected, desolate child. But as he held her, as he thought of what his words meant, his feelings grew, he held her closer, stooping down to kiss her lips. Her lips were cold, he pressed them warmly, yet more warmly. Lucilla drew back, shrank from him. He would not let her go, would not yield

to her shrinking, holding her more closely, kissing her as a man kisses the girl he loves, startling her into consciousness. He could feel, then, for one moment, that her lips responded, clung to his, now her head lay against his heart.

"My darling," he said, "my sweet one, we must not part. I thought I could give you up. I didn't understand but I do now. Don't try to get away from me, I shall never let you go. There is no one in the world but me to take care of you. And I will; I swear it. Kiss me. No! Well, then, I'll kiss you. . . . You love me, and you know you do; don't you love me? Forget Nettie, forget your father, forget everything, but that you love me and we are not going to part any more."

Mordaunt was perhaps warmer than he knew, she perhaps less in love with him than conscious of loving him, a distinction he should have understood. Her slight form trembled in his arms; a moment she clung to him, the next she shrank from him; there was something in her manner that did not satisfy him. "Say that you love me"—even then she hesitated—"and that you will stay with me."

She looked around her.

"I can't stay here," she answered slowly, irresolutely.

"Only for this one night, to-morrow I will find somewhere better, in the country. You will like that; you love the country. I will take you away from London. Trust me; you do trust me, don't you?"

"I did! I did!" said poor Lucilla, back on the

sofa, her head buried in the cushions. "But it is spoilt, it is all spoilt. Nettie said——"

"Never mind what Nettie said. Listen to me, listen."

Now with his arms about her, her face against his cheek, his breath encompassing her, her slightness against his strength, he pleaded, argued, fought that she should give herself to him.

She listened, she could not but listen as he lay beside her on the sofa and whispered in her ear . . . a new warmth seemed thrilling through her veins, her heart began to beat with strange and rapid throbs. He was no longer her hero, her protector, he was something dearer, closer than that.

He wanted her to say that she loved him. Of course she loved him, would not leave him, there was no one else in the whole world who cared for her like this, for whom she cared.

"Darling! then you will stay with me. . . ?"

He left her presently and went in search of the landlady.

"I will be back in five minutes, sweetest; I must make some arrangement for you for to-night. To-morrow I'll take you back into the country. We must never be parted again . . ."

He went out, shutting the door quietly. That answering thrill Lucilla felt as he kissed her was still in her, a thrill of pleasure, excitement, joy beyond all words or expression. But it scarcely lasted beyond the shutting of the door. Then

she sprang up, then her heart began to beat differently.

“O God! what shall I do? what must I do?” It was fright, it was terror that came upon her then, undefined, indefinable, cold unreasoning terror.

What was it Nettie said? Was it of that she was in terror? She did not know. It must be Mordaunt—it *was* Mordaunt! She could not stay to see him, she would not stay. She must run away somewhere, anywhere. She was shuddering, frightened, quite beyond reason.

She tore open the door, rushing from the room as one who fears pursuit, her breath coming fast, that strange thrill unnerving her. She only knew that she must get away, hide from him. Her lips were warm from his kisses; it was from them she fled. She knew that she loved him, was weak, could deny him nothing he asked.

Down through the dark narrow staircase, swiftly, timidly she fled, out through the door, into the street, away from that room where he would seek her, away from him, because . . . *because* she loved him she ran and ran . . .

From her lover's arms she sought the shelter of the streets! She ran like Atalanta, pursued by Furies, but the fury from which she ran was the one she found in her own breast. She knew she could deny him nothing. . . .

CHAPTER XIV

MORDAUNT'S interview in some back region with his landlady took him some time longer than he had anticipated. He was impatient to be back with Lucilla ; he was conscious of her alarm and hesitation, he knew his wooing was not done. He would take her in the country, give her time, lure, not snare her, his shy bird. He meant well by her, not ill ; in every way he would care for her.

Arrangements had to be made and his landlady was not very complaisant ; it was fully half an hour before he returned to the sitting-room ; then he meant to reassure her, to reassure her in his arms.

He could scarcely believe his eyes when he found the room empty. He was conscious of surprise, of chill and disappointment, of even anger. But to that feeling quickly succeeded another, it was fear, anxiety for the girl herself. Of course he went feverishly through all the open rooms of the house, down the staircase ; anywhere she might have wandered, searching for him. But No. 63 Cecil Street, Strand, is not a palatial abode, and there are no elaborate curtains or draperies where she might be hidden. Hope of that sort was very soon over.

He went back into the room and sat down on the well-worn wooden chair.

“Damnation !”

That was the first word that rose to his lips ; not meaningless it seemed to him in the first sick moment of dread.

“Damnation !”

His or hers ? The blow was sudden, and he could not realise its import. Again and again he searched ; behind curtains, in corners, under the sofa, even in the bedroom, where perchance she might have doubled back on him. He questioned the landlady feverishly again and again, until that irate person resented it by an insinuation so foul that the man fell back from her, suddenly in his heart an exquisite tenderness that was as unbearable as pain.

“My God ! what have I done ? where has she gone ? what can have happened to her ?”

Up and down the stairs, and into the streets he went, where the thronged pavements echoed hurrying footsteps, but never hers. Back into the room again, empty, cold, and maddening, no answer in it to the question.

“But where could she have gone ; where ?”

His arms were empty, his heart as heavy as lead. Where was the child ? He did not know where to search for her, or how to set about it. Then an idea came to him, and he sprang from his seat and began walking up and down the room. She was not gone from his reach altogether ; perhaps conscience had stung her and she had rushed back to Southampton Row to plead with Nettie ! He pictured her, and the useless humiliating explana-

tions. Mordaunt had no hopes in Nettie. He groaned again as he thought of the scene, of the folly of it, but he would not leave her to brave it alone. Once the idea possessed him that she had gone back to Southampton Row, he would not listen to any doubts that intruded. She had gone back. He or his love had startled her, he had not been gentle enough! She had after all, perhaps, not understood him. But then he flushed, for he knew that what he feared was not lest she understood him, but that she had understood him too well! "Good God! perhaps she had been frightened of him!" But surely she would be more frightened with Nettie, and Nettie, brute that she was, might still pretend to disbelieve her story. Those two together, Lucilla and Nettie, and he not there to protect her! This certainty was worse than the nameless dread that filled his heart when he found her gone from his room, the street door open, alone and in such a neighbourhood.

He rushed out again, hatless; the passing hansom he hailed was all too slow, it crawled; and meantime Nettie might be talking to the girl, or might, even worse, or yet, perhaps, not worse, have thrust her back into the streets, he not there to help!

He was out of the hansom and thundering at the door before the phlegmatic cabman had pulled up his lame horse. And then for a moment, on the doorstep, his senses came back; the house was quiet and there was a light in the hall that told him Roly was not yet home. Was she here? His heart doubted it before his mind admitted the doubt.

The butler opened the door. He stared at Mordaunt's pale, distracted face, holding the door ajar, not knowing whether to let him in or not.

Mordaunt answered that question by pushing his way in.

"Is anyone up?" he asked quickly.

"The missus hasn't gone to bed, sir, but she is in her own room."

Mordaunt went into the dining-room, followed by the man. And Mordaunt, Mordaunt Rivers, was actually too nervous to ask the next question that trembled on his lips.

"Tell me," he said at length, "what happened when she came home?" He could hardly wait the answer.

"The missus? When the missus came home this afternoon?"

"No, no; damn the missus! I mean now, just now, when Miss Lucilla came home."

"When you and Miss Lucy came in?" repeated the man in perplexity, looking at Mordaunt as if he had gone out of his mind.

Mordaunt nearly shook him, so mad and impatient was he.

"Hasn't Miss Lucilla been here since then?"

"Since then? No, sir, I should think she ain't, and wouldn't be likely to if she could hear how the missus has been going on ever since Jane let out quite accidentally that Miss Lucy went out with you yesterday, and hadn't come home yet."

Mordaunt's legs refused to bear his burden, he sat down.

“What am I to do? what the devil am I to do?” he said, almost mechanically. Mechanically, too, he drew out his watch; it was an hour and a half now since he left her. Not in his rooms, not in his house, not here! All these last two days she had been with him, growing into his heart, his dreams had been of her, and she had filled his waking and his sleeping hours. Now his arms, his arms were empty; and the girl? what of the girl; where was she, where could she be?

“I did hear, sir,” went on the man confidentially, “that there was a awful row between the missus and master. Signor Antonelli, he’d been too civil to Miss Gay, and the missus insulted her, and master took her part, and,” here he sank his voice sympathetically, “I don’t think there’s no good you waiting, sir. The master ain’t coming home to-night.”

It all went empty through Mordaunt’s brain, the gossip of the servant’s hall, more that ~~was~~ disreputable in this disreputable house. But Lucilla! What had become of Lucilla?

He asked the man again and again if he were sure she had not come home. He even insisted on his going up to the girl’s room to see if she had not returned without the household being aware of it.

It was all of no use, the girl was not there. The cab was still at the door, and he drove quickly back to Cecil Street; where again there was no trace, no tidings of her. It was nearly three now; she had

been missing from that lodging house in the Strand for two whole mortal hours. He was not going to think of what might have happened. The landlady's coarse conjecture drove him mad, he clenched his teeth to prevent them rattling. Lucilla, in her fair childish beauty was as if before him, the bright happy girl who had begged him to stay until to-morrow, to let her have one more delightful day in the country. What was happening to her ?

He could not rest in the room. He went out in the street, and stood still so long at the corner that a curious policeman, watching him, thought perhaps that he was too drunk to move, and wanted assistance.

"Fine night, sir," he said tentatively.

It was a fine night, the moon at its fullest, the dark night-clouds star-spangled. Mordaunt looked at the policeman.

"Suppose you lost a girl in the middle of the Strand, and you did not know where on earth she had got to, what would you do ? "

"A wrong 'un ? " interrogatively.

"Curse you, no ; a girl, a child, innocent as an angel."

"I should inquire at Bow Street."

"Of course, what a fool I am. Here, take this." He threw him a half-crown. "And find me the quickest hansom in the town."

He drove to Bow Street when the hansom had been summoned, although what he expected to find there, and what was to be the upshot of it,

he did not know. He was getting dulled, and incapable of clear thought.

The inspector received him civilly, and listened to his rather lame story.

"You were taking the girl home, and you suddenly lost sight of her just near Cecil Street, Strand. This was at one o'clock. Was there anyone in sight?" he asked, pausing in writing down the account.

Mordaunt was non-plussed. There were two policemen in the room as well as the inspector; he could not explain matters before such an audience.

"Look here," he said abruptly to the man, "let me speak to you alone, and I'll explain matters. I must have the girl found."

The requisite orders were given; but Mordaunt did not find the inspector a sympathetic audience. The matter seemed very mysterious to him and rather shady. Here was this gentleman, with his halting story about taking a girl home, and losing her in the streets. A young girl, a pretty girl, a girl to whom he said he was not related! Mordaunt put his case very badly.

"The girl had been away with me for a day, and when we got back there was a row. She . . . they turned her out of the house. I had no choice so I took her home with me; I left her for a few moments to give some orders; when I came back she was gone."

He waited.

"She has run back home, probably; that's what

she's done." The inspector seemed quite relieved at this solution!

"I have just come from there. She has not been heard of."

"Well, sir, if you will give me a description of her, I will have inquiries made. I have no doubt, under the circumstances you tell me, she has gone to some of her friends."

"She hasn't a friend in the world, but myself." His voice was unsteady with emotion, the truth of the words shook him. "Not a friend in the world!"

"Then you think . . . ?"

"I don't know what I think, or fear; I am half mad with suspense."

"You think she may have tried to make away with herself?" The inspector unbent, for he saw now that the gentleman was really in trouble. The girl he was after seemed to be a straight one, and the whole affair genuine. He grew so sympathetic presently that when he was relieved from duty he volunteered to go round with him to all the likely places where they might get information.

What a night Mordaunt spent! They went from policeman to policeman, from station to station, finally from hospital to hospital. Nobody had seen a fair young girl, almost a child, in a white flannel dress and a sailor hat. Yet surely the costume is not common in the middle of the night! Suggestions were made, opinions were given; suggestions that were maddening in their hideous uncertainty, opinions for any one of which Mordaunt could have murdered the giver on the spot.

It is needless to dilate on the horrors they saw, or the fearful places to which they went. They searched every possible and impossible place in the West and East End of London, they questioned many vile women, they tried threats and bribes in disorderly and dreadful houses. But when daylight broke the next day they had heard nothing. It is true that one or two prowling night birds had told them vaguely they had seen a young girl new to the work in Piccadilly; but they could not get this confirmed, and there was no clue to pursue.

The moon faded and the twinkling stars died in the dawn. The sun rose redly from out of its hot-bed of mist, and a life that was not the foul life of the night began to stir in the streets. Blinds were pulled up, like human eyes opening lazily to the morning work. Milk-carts rattled over the stones, London began to bestir itself in the daylight. But still they were without news.

Mordaunt looked haggard and ill, his eyes blood-shot.

"You'd best go home now, sir; we'll bring you news the instant we get it. There is nothing more we can do just now."

He went home, and sat again in the room where he had left the girl. What he had seen, what he had heard, though none of it was new to him, though there was nothing of which he had not known, bore a different aspect when looked at as he had looked at it to-night, through Lucilla's childlike eyes. The uncertainty of her whereabouts weighed

upon him. How far he had been to blame he could not think. Was it from him she had run away—and to what ?

He buried his head in his hands. He saw every imaginable horror that could have befallen a girl befalling her. He did not feel like a lover whose promised mistress was torn from his arms ; he felt like a man who had done a child to death, driven a child into the streets. All his life had been a nightmare, now it was a Walpurgis night about him. He saw her before him in a thousand aspects, he burned to save her. She became to him in those dreadful hours his one responsibility, his one crime. He knew he would never rest until he found her.

CHAPTER XV

BUT Mordaunt Rivers was not an idle gentleman living on his means. He was a man whose brain had to find his daily food. He could not afford to be idle. It was Tuesday when Lucilla disappeared. *Footlights* came out on Friday; after his two days' idleness he had work to do.

A journalist and an actor are the real slaves of the public; the one must write, the other must act, no matter what tragedy is going on in the little of private life that belongs to them.

Mordaunt took his tub and ate his breakfast and sat down to forget the incidents of the night and of the last two days, and word spicy paragraphs, write columns of theatrical gossip, for his paper. But his work came hard to him. To write a humorous and suggestive lie, or even truth, about some "Maudie" or "Tottie," or the new dancer at the Alhambra seemed rather sickening to him, when he had just come away from seeing where such "Maudies" and such "Totties" end their gaities!

He literally could not work long in this humour. The room was full of remembrance. He still saw Lucilla there, as he had carried her in, as he had held her in his arms on the sofa and felt beneath his own her reluctant lips. Had they

been reluctant lips ? Even now he was not sure, remembering she had clung to him.

He thought he could finish his work better at the office ; but walking down the busy Strand, looking under every hat, watching every hurrying figure, hardly improved matters.

The *Footlights*' offices consisted of two rooms ; one was ink-splashed and papers-littered, and here the bulk of the work was done. The other communicated with it only by a trap-door arrangement in the wall and was approached from a different staircase. This was Roly's sanctum ; it was comfortably, almost luxuriantly furnished.

Mordaunt thought of Roland sitting there at his ease, perhaps with Tessie Gay, perhaps with Jenny Farrell ; and he thought of Roland's daughter, and Roland's carelessness of her, and his heart grew hot and bitter against his whilom friend.

He did the essential work and left the office. But somehow he could not tear himself away. He saw as vividly as if he were in the other room, Roly, lounging in a chair or sofa, drinking, talking volubly of women, or horses. And he pictured Roly's daughter, her appealing eyes and wistful smile, in some dire strait, alone.

He paused, irresolute, a moment ; then hurriedly returning, not stopping to think, he broke in upon the editorial repose.

"Hallo, Mordaunt, old man ! Come in ; shut the door, it's cold. Got copy enough ? I'm not up to work myself this morning ; you can manage, I suppose ? "

Roly was sprucely dressed in frock-coat and light trousers. He was one of those stout men who wear spats, white waistcoats, and gardenias.

"Anything wrong?"

Roly avoided Mordaunt's eye and seemed jumpy.

"I suppose you've seen Nettie?" he asked.

"I saw her last night."

Both men waited. Roly wanted to hear if Mordaunt had heard of his row with Nettie, and what he thought of it. Mordaunt wanted to know if Roly had heard of Lucilla's disappearance, and if he blamed him.

"What did she say?"

"She was like a lunatic. God knows what she didn't say."

"I've half a mind not to go back there. I'm about fed up with Nettie; I can tell you that." Roly looked inquiringly, irresolutely at Mordaunt. "I'll tell you what happened. Lusher had two house-boats, and he'd asked the usual party. Nettie was to be in the first boat with the steady ones, the McDougals, and that semi-respectable lot, and Tessie Gay, Arthur Campbell, and all the music-hall division, were to be in the other. Lord Sandel was going to bring Tessie down, but it seems he missed the train. That Whitechapel brute, Antonelli, came with her instead. The instructions about the boats were muddled, and we were all, more or less, together. We had a fairly jolly day, though the women were sparring at each other most of the time. In the evening Tessie started singing. We were all a little 'on,' I daresay, it had

been a long day. Antonelli joined in the chorus, or said something; I am not very clear what he did say or do. You see, it was after dinner. Anyway, Nettie fired up and insulted Tessie; said she wasn't fit company for her to have been asked to meet! Of course Tessie wasn't going to stand that; why should she? She's a thorough good sort, is Tessie; it was through me she was asked. I took her part; Nettie kicked up hell. You're right about her. I swear she's mad. The upshot of it was that Nettie came back to town alone and I slept at Long's. What did she say to you?"

"It was about Lucilla." Mordaunt began, hesitatingly.

"Good Heavens! By Jove! do you know, I'd clean forgotten the girl's existence. I say, I hope she won't wreak her spite against me on the girl. Poor little Lucy! Extraordinary thing, on my word, until this moment I'd never given the girl a thought. I'll go home to-night. It won't be the first row we've been through. Would you believe I'd forgotten all about the girl? Of course I must go back."

"I don't find it difficult to believe," Mordaunt answered, still slowly. It was difficult to tell Roly what he had come there to tell him.

Roly finished his brandy-and-soda. Mordaunt strove to gain command over his speech:

"We missed the last train. Lucilla didn't get home until yesterday. Nettie said . . ."

"Why, what on earth is the matter, Rivers, old man? You're as white as a ghost. What is it all about? Have a drink? Where was Lucy, who was

she with ? and what was it to Nettie ? I'm quite at sea ; I don't know what you're talking about."

Mordaunt leaned against a chair. He had the wildest, most unreasoning inclination to break into a abuse of Nettie, Roly, himself, everybody and everything.

Something he must say, Roly must be told. He took the proffered drink ; he was just about to tell Roly the whole history of the last two days, when the door was flung open noisily.

" Well, upon my word ; you have got a face . . . "

It was Nettie, Nettie herself, and in the same temper as when he had last encountered her.

Roly had not been home all night ; but that had not alarmed her for his allegiance ; she had almost forgotten what their row had been about. So unreasonable a person was Nettie, that Tessie and Antonelli and Roly had all sunk into the background. All her evil temper concentrated on Mordaunt and the unhappy Lucilla.

" I'd like to know what you are doing here ? " she said to Mordaunt. " Have you told Roly ? Does he know ? What does Roly say ? "

" No," he returned quietly ; " I have not yet told him. I am here to tell him."

Roly looked from one to the other ; looked round the room, with its Maple upholstery, its sofas and easy-chairs, as if for some means of escape from an explanation he did not know of what, but that he saw was impending. But there was no means of escape.

" If Roly had the spirit of a mouse he'd put you out of the room, he'd chuck you out of the office, he'd have nothing more to do with you." She

repeated what she said the other night, used a foul word about the girl. Mordaunt was not in the humour for it. He retorted, perhaps unwisely ; and she sprang at him like a wild cat. He caught her by the two hands, and held them.

“Don’t dare to say another word. . . .”

“I shall say what I like, leave hold of me. I’ll make it as hot as I can for you. I’ll tell your wife ; I know where she is.”

“I dare say. You’re birds of a feather. Have you done ? ”

“No, I shan’t have done with you until you’ve got your board and lodging at Government expense ; and then I shan’t, for I’ll come and see you on visiting days, and tell you what the boys are saying, and what the girl is doing. . . .”

“My patience is nearly exhausted. Say one other word about the girl, let her name pass your foul lips, and I’ll——”

He had really almost lost his self-control. He put his hand on her throat.

Roly pulled himself together then and came between them.

“Here, drop that, Mordie, old man ; what is it all about ? I can’t make head or tail of it. What are you supposed to have done ? ”

In two brutal sentences Nettie told him.

Roly grew red, and blustered ; he moistened his lips before he spoke, and his voice was harsh and unnatural.

“You are quite right, Nettie,” he said. “He’s . . . he’s a damned scoundrel. By God ! it’s a criminal

charge ; he could go to jail for it. The girl isn't eighteen."

"Why don't you prosecute me?" said Mordaunt, wearily, dropping his hands from Nettie, facing them both. "Why don't you?"

"I've a damned good mind to," said Roly, still blustering.

"Perhaps you'd like to hear what my plea would be?"

"I don't care a damn."

"I should plead guilty. I should plead that I took the girl out of a disreputable house, where you live with a woman who is not your wife. I should call Lady Lusher and Miss Farrell as specimens of your visiting circle. I'd have Nettie and you in the witness-box together. My God!" losing his patience, "to think of people like *you* talking of law. My God! what a lot you are! And you dare to threaten me with the law, because I took her away from it."

He paused, not because his indignation was spent, but because of what had followed on his taking her away. Again his heart was like lead.

Nettie tried to strike him. Mordaunt stood quiet under her onslaught ; he had had his say. If only the girl had been with him, as they surmised, he would have gone away then, said no more. Roly had been his friend, and Nettie had been his friend but now a loathing and disgust for both of them filled his mind. He wished to deny nothing, explain nothing.

He stood quite silent while Nettie poured forth vituperation, and Roly filled and emptied his glass,

listening. Mordaunt was weighted by his leaden heart. Where was she, where was she, whilst they talked here?

"That's enough," he said at length. "I can't stand any more of it; I am going. Roly, when you are alone, I have something to say to you. You'll find me at Cecil Street." He turned to go.

"I don't want to have anything to do with you."

Mordaunt shrugged his shoulders and went. He left the well-assorted couple together. He had not told Roly how far he was blameless; nor, as he had intended, of the disappearance of the girl. He thought, as he went out, that he would break every tie that still bound him to these people; give up his work on *Footlights*; find some pursuit or occupation that would give him back his self-respect and independence.

He went home, and sent in his resignation to the paper. Then he went through the worst time in his life. He spent his days and nights searching, but he could get no tidings of the lost girl. She was lost from her birth, lost in her childhood; there had never been any hope for her. But her possible fate appalled him. The days crushed heavily over him, the moments were hours, the hours days, and the nights insupportable. His life seemed empty of everything save his useless search, his brain acted only in the one direction.

But the days and weeks and months passed by, and the juggernaut of time, in its passing, erased all trace and footstep of the girl he sought. She had vanished in the abyss, been swallowed up in the darkness of the city, and the darkness gathered deeper around him, shutting him out from his fellows.

CHAPTER XVI

THERE were times when the memory of her, as he had seen her that day at Halliford, her eyes radiant with happiness from the mere sight of green trees and cool waters, almost drove him to suicide. The uncertainty as to what those eyes would now be gazing upon drove him wild. He would sit in that comfortless room of his in Cecil Street evening after evening, with the roar of the street falling on his ears, going over and over again the last time he had seen her; feeling again the slender form in his arms, the lips growing warmer under his kisses. He would go to bed and lie awake long hours, haunted by her, unable to rest, unable to think of anything save where she might be, what she might be going through, what degradation and misery she might be enduring. He never lost his sense of responsibility for her.

Everyone accredited him with the girl's disappearance. The idle chaff, the hardly-veiled paragraphs, and "answers to correspondents," in *Footlights* burned him like vitriol. The whole set, the drinking, bar-loafing, loose-living set, amongst whom his life had passed, became repulsive and degrading to him.

Mordaunt Rivers was five-and-thirty. He had been the petted and only child of his mother. She lived luxuriously, and nothing was too much for her only boy. He was educated at Marlborough,

and when he left he was captain of the school, full of promise and talent, a handsome, fearless lad, over whom any mother's heart might rejoice.

He had never asked the source of the luxuries and his liberal allowance, and all the best of it. Boys take these things from their parents unquestioningly. Of course he thought his mother was a widow. His holidays were spent with a tutor. When he came home, at nineteen, to consider his career, and rest from his school honours before plunging into life, she was abroad. There was no hand to guide him, no voice to restrain him ; he had only the experience of a schoolboy to aid him in keeping afloat on the sea of life in London.

He learnt to gamble and to live loosely, never asking whose money he was spending. He was supposed to be rich, he thought he was rich, taking his mother's lavish gifts without shame or blame, as a child does.

It was not until he was a married man—a married man at twenty years of age—and awoke from a drunken love-dream of a week to find himself mated to a woman whose womanhood had vanished almost before he was born, that he learnt from her foul lips that his mother would have no cause to complain of him for his choice of a wife. Brought up to spend money like water, but to ask to be given, he heard without any preparation, in the dawn of his manhood, from his wife's lips, how the money had been obtained. In those first few months of despair and abandonment he placed it out of his power to free himself from the fetters he had forged.

From the shock of all that knowledge there

emerged the grown man : a man without faith in humanity, in woman, in God. But still a man. At his mother's feet he left all his illusions, spurning her with bitter words when she prayed him not to turn from her, not to take from her the one thing that she loved. She admitted that when his father died, leaving her penniless with an unnamed child, she had taken the basest way, the only way ; but her love for him had never wavered. So she told him, but he had no forgiveness for her. He was too young to forgive, and too wounded.

Sin succeeds sin, and sin succeeds sin, in ever-broadening circles. Mordaunt Rivers lived to outgrow his horror of his mother, to kiss her before she died, without even expecting her to die repentant for what she had done to him. He lived to see the woman he had made his wife go deeper down into the depths, as the drink-fiend grew on her with her age. He had seen her in the streets, and saved her from the streets, and met her there again. He lived even to outgrow his horror of her, and such as her, and to become calloused.

He had lived to laugh at his boyish despair and to teach other lads to laugh when their eyes were opened and they had seen what he had seen, had learnt to think that all women were as these women, and that there was no life worth living but this life of revel, no city open to him but Bohemia.

He had made his way in that city, forgotten or fought down his better instincts, made friends and a place for himself where his birth was never a reproach, where his wife was little worse than other

men's wives, where morality and right were as unknown words as duty and responsibility. He ate and drank and made merry. Merry over vice, merry over misery, merry over degradation of every kind. He learnt to have no ambition save the ambition of keeping himself from want, no desires save the desire to refrain from reflection.

Then there came Lucilla into his life, and, like a pure stream flowing into a muddy river, disturbed its surface. Lucilla had disappeared, but Mordaunt could not be as he had been before he knew her.

He had an odd, sudden growth in moral strength. Under the influence of it, the scandal, the vulgarity, the coarseness that distinguished *Footlights* became distasteful to him. He sought for, and easily obtained, a post on another paper. He had never drank, but he gave up just now the habit of taking a brandy-and-soda for breakfast. And when the drunken outcast who called him husband made her next appeal on his purse, he even went the length of making a last final effort to save her from her life of public-houses and street-corners. He tried to persuade her to go into a Home.

She laughed at him saying she enjoyed life in her own way. He ought to allow her more, she grumbled. The next time she was up before a magistrate she would tell him her husband drove her to the streets through his meanness. These were the things she said to him. The miserable woman was known at every police-court in London. Mordaunt, purposely poor, purposely unknown, saw his name constantly dragged through the mud by her.

"Not to think" had been the watchword of his years, the philosophy had almost conquered the man, the passing hour sufficing him. He had even grown comparatively content; bitter, perhaps not unnaturally, with a vitriol tongue and pen, jeering at virtue, because there was no virtue in him. He had forgotten, or perhaps did not know, that he could still feel as other men feel until Lucilla came and taught him differently.

But the years had left their mark, and gradually he drifted back to where he had been. The hopelessness of his life became merged in the hopelessness of finding Lucilla. He had kept away from Roly, from the Cormorant, from everywhere and everyone; living alone in those rooms from which the girl had fled. But this could not last indefinitely. There came a time when the peopled solitude oppressed him beyond endurance. A great man, or even a bad man, might have been driven to some course of action that would have changed his career. But Mordaunt Rivers had not the elements of greatness in him. Under happier auspices he might have remained a man, but his youth-crisis had destroyed that chance, and he was only a Bohemian.

Sick of the room, sick of his solitude, of the mild platitudes with which he filled his columns on the *Post*, he went out one night in a reckless mood. There was no burning house for him to wreak his energies on, no adventures, no accidents to distract his attention.

So what did he do? Nothing great, or grand, or even startling. He was sick of himself, and his use-

less, heart-breaking quest. He wanted to be amused ; he did not feel like going to the club, for he shrank from a possible allusion. He failed to realise that Lucilla and his connection with her had been forgotten. The streets were dull, the theatre boards unattractive. Idly he strolled into a music-hall.

The music-hall into which he strolled was the Eden. He stood a few moments at the end of the stalls, his thoughts hardly on the stage. But presently he noted a something unusual in the air of the place, an electricity, a stir as if an event were about to happen. Once attracted, his attention became concentrated.

To begin with, the place was crowded, the amphitheatre and the stuffy little boxes, the gallery and the entire hall of the building were full. And all "the boys" were there. There was a surging to and fro, coarse chaff and comment, unceasing popping of corks, the whole atmosphere tense with excitement.

"What is going on ?" he asked of the first bystander ; for the stage was empty and gave him no information.

"They've got a new singer. Tessie Gay's got the 'chuck' for being drunk ; and Tessie's friends are going to make a row. We've come to see the fun ?"

Mordaunt, knowing well who Tessie's friends were, was glad he was here. As the cry of battle to the war-horse, so was the promise of a row to him in his present mood. He wanted something to take him out of himself, and here was the something. After all, it was the so-called "boys" who were his friends, and Roly. In truth, Mordaunt was longing for a sight of Roly's face, and Ted's and Tom's, and

all of them. He had stayed away too long, and for nothing, it seemed at this moment ; where were they all ? Somewhere about, of that he might be sure, and eager to welcome him amongst them. He had always been with them, leader of their revels, the one man with a head on him when consequences were to be averted.

He made his way among the large audience carefully but steadily, and he soon reached the bar that ran parallel with the platform, at the right side of the stalls.

He easily found what he sought. Tessie herself was drinking at the bar. Tessie, with her bold face and pretty dimples, arrayed in rustling silk, diamonds in her ears, a white hat with feathers crowning her costume, had certainly already drunk sufficient to need looking after. Her elbows were on the bar, and she was talking excitedly, surrounded by a body-guard, of whom Roly was the foremost. He was, however, supported by the whole staff of *Footlights* and the Southampton Row *habitués*. Tom Furley was there and Charlie Morgan, Lord Lusher, Ted Smith ; all Mordaunt's old pals.

Mordaunt took up his position behind a pillar ; he did not want to be seen just yet, only to see. He knew there would be work for him presently. Tessie was half drunk, Roly loquacious ; all the rest of them out for blood.

Sticks and umbrellas were rapping on the ground, cat-calls and impatient cries began to resound from all parts of the house ; loudest of all were the calls from the bar corner.

At length the little hand-bell was struck.

"Ladies and gentlemen," announced the chairman, "Miss Tottie Tartkins will next appear."

There was a momentary hush, during which a blowsy young lady, dressed in true music-hall style, liberal low neck, half short skirt, high-heeled shoes, advanced to the footlights.

The band struck up; she opened her mouth. Her voice was no worse than other music-hall voices, she was not more vulgar or less vulgar than other music-hall artistes; but the public, who had resented the dismissal of their favourite, would have none of her. They shrieked her down with falsetto imitations, they stamped her down with sticks and umbrellas, they hissed her and cat-called her down with every variety of noise they could devise. Loudest of all, most prominent of all, were Tessie and her little group of supporters in the corner.

Three times did the unfortunate girl start with the orchestra. She grew pale underneath the rouge. It was her daily bread and beer of which they were depriving her. But it was of no use. They did not and they would not hear her. Presently shouts for Tessie began to mingle with the other cries. Tessie, from her corner, acknowledged the cries, calling out to this or the other person she recognised in the voice that seemed so common as it issued from the pretty lips. She nodded her head at them, while the feathers danced about.

Three times the chairman rose to order, three times he was yelled down, and the row went on worse than ever. Mordaunt, from behind the

pillar, saw the hall filling quietly with policemen, saw them making their observations, edging their way gradually toward the bar.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" shouted the chairman, for the fourth time, loudly, hoarsely, rapping on the table with all his might. "Ladies *and* gentlemen!"

"Tessie! Tessie Gay!"

" 'O what a lark, out after dark.' "

They began to strike up the first verse of the song by which their favourite had gained her reputation.

"Tessie! We want to hear Tessie!"

" 'O what a lark . . . ' "

There was more loud rapping.

"Ladies and gentlemen, in the unavoidable absence of Miss Tessie Gay——"

"Oh, you liar! Here I am. Take that."

Up went Tessie's shapely arm; in her hand a champagne-bottle, the first missile handy. The chairman got a broken head, the policemen made a rush. Some miscreant turned off the gas. Such a shrieking and howling as defies description followed. Before the gas went out Mordaunt had marked where Roly stood. He went up to him.

"That's you, Roly, isn't it? We must get out of this; hold on to me; now then."

"No, no; I must look after Tessie. Leave me alone."

"Tom's looking after Tessie. I saw him haul her off when the gas went out. You don't want your name in all the papers to-morrow. Come along."

He took hold of Roly's arm. 'By the time lights were procured and arrests being made he had hurried him down the side and nearly to the door. Then Roly tried again to get free.

"I must go back. I must look after Tessie."

"Tessie is all right; everybody will look after her. The police are batoning the crowd, and making arrests. We've got to get out. Come."

"Look out, look out, Rivers! *Footlights* to the rescue! Hurrah!"

Tom had caught sight of him, Tom Furley. He and Ted Smith, and Charlie and a dozen or more journalists, loafers, flash gentlemen in evening clothes with Tessie in their midst, were pushing their way toward the door. There was no doubt Tessie was thoroughly enjoying herself, shouting and waving her hands, saying she was not going to leave the hall, she wouldn't be saved, wouldn't be hurried. She said she would sing, if she had to die for it. And she did sing! They tried to carry her out of the *mélée* but she sang all the time:

" 'O what a lark, out after dark,' "

and the crowd took it up and shouted with her.

Law and order won. Tessie was arrested, and many of the *Footlights* contingent, in their rush to the rescue, shared the same fate. Some heads were broken, Roly's among the number. He had all the awkwardness of obesity, and could neither help himself nor others. But he escaped arrest, for in the end Mordaunt half led, half carried him into the streets, and, hailing a hansom, took him to Cecil Street.

CHAPTER XVII

ROLY had been knocked about in the *fracas*. The blow on the head and the drink rather muddled his faculties. It did not seem strange to him that he should be in Mordaunt's room and that Mordaunt should be helping him to get straight. And presently other fellows came in, and to them also it seemed natural, since there had been a row, that Rivers should be with them, or they with him. Rivers's place was with them, he had always been there on such occasions.

But to Mordaunt it seemed very strange and incredible that Roly should be sitting on the sofa where he had laid Lucilla that night, that these men should be in the room that had been the scene of his short love-story. He could not doubt that he was glad, their presence banished spectres.

They talked over the affair while he mixed drinks for them and wounds were bound up.

"But what is to become of Tessie? One of us must go and bail her out."

"I've arranged for that," answered Tom. "Lusher has gone. I don't believe they would have stood one of us, and Sandel did not want to appear in the affair at all. He was dead against it from the first. I say, how drunk Tessie was!"

"How did you manage about the gas?"

"That's my secret. As a matter of fact, bribery and Ted did it, between them; but we mulled it afterwards. I meant Tessie to have given her song while the gas was out, and then the whole lot of us to have hoofed it before it was re-lit, but the cops were too quick."

"Let's go round to the Cormorant, and see what people are saying about it. They collared Ted, you know, but we got him away. I don't believe they've arrested a single one of the right people, and they've got about fourteen poor devils altogether."

"Come on, Rivers, there's some sparring on to-night, too. I'm just in the humour for it, I'd like a bout myself." The speaker put himself in attitude, his fists up.

"I'll follow with Roly when he has made himself look a little more decent," answered Mordaunt. And they left him there finally, alone with Lucilla's father.

Roly was still on the sofa.

"Nettie will kick up the devil of a row when she hears I've been in this; she's got the fair needle about Tessie."

"Oh, you're still with Nettie, then?"

"Always shall be, I suppose. Mordaunt, old man, we've missed you awfully."

"And I've missed you."

The two men did not look at each other. The memory of Lucilla was between them; but drawing them together were all the ties of old association. The paper, that Mordaunt had helped to start; Nettie; the Southampton Row clique that Mordaunt had always dominated.

"The paper is going to the devil."

"Oh no, the paper is an accomplished fact. I'm sure the circulation hasn't gone down, nor the advertisements. I've kept my eye on them. You've got all the rest of the old set, I see."

"There's no go in it without you. It's flat and stale. I wish you were with us still."

Neither of them spoke of Lucilla; both of them were thinking of her.

"How does your head feel now?"

"Oh! that's all right; but I shan't go to the Cormorant. It's an age since we've had a chat."

"What will Nettie say when she knows you've been here, with me?"

"She's got over all that a long time ago. Nettie's tempers don't last long, that's one good thing about them. She'd be very glad to see you if you came back. She often speaks of you."

"It's impossible."

There was a pause; Roly was rather at a loss what to say. He wanted Mordaunt back very badly; he missed him in so many ways. He was willing to forgive him for having abducted his daughter. But his willingness made him uncomfortable; he was afraid of what Mordaunt would think of it.

"Roly," began Mordaunt, abruptly, getting up from his chair, walking to the window, talking with his back turned to her father, "I suppose you know Lucilla is not with me, never has been with me?"

"Let's agree not to talk about that. You've taken her, and," there was positively a break in emotional Roly's voice, "I hope you'll be good to

her, better than ever I was. C^ome back to *Foot-lights* ; you can have double screⁿ, or I'll give Lucy an income. Perhaps some day you might take me to see her. Poor little girl ! she hadn't much of a chance, 'you were the best fellow in our lot, Mordie ; she made the best choice she could. I don't want to think about it. But I'd like you to tell her I say she took the best man she saw. Let's talk of something else ; it always gives me the pip."

"From the night Nettie turned her out of the house until this moment, I swear to my God I have never set eyes on the girl. I would give my right hand at this moment to know where she is."

Now Mordaunt faced him. He was pale, and his manner was so earnest and intense that Roly sat up, pale too, and stared at him.

"What do you mean ; what the devil do you mean ? "

Roly sat up on the sofa, and Mordaunt told him shortly, but with an emotion he could not conceal, of Lucilla's disappearance, of his vain search for her, of the efforts he had made, and their non-result.

Roly listened breathlessly ; the inference both men drew was obvious. Roly covered his face under his hands.

"Good God ! but why didn't you take better care of her ? Why didn't you look after her ? "

That was Roly all over, Mordaunt thought bitterly. Why had not *he* taken better care ? The ice broken, however, the two men felt drawn together. Mordaunt told Roly all he had done ; there was nothing further Roly could suggest. Together

they thought over every possible and probable contingency but the problem remained unsolved. Far into the morning they talked, and they parted friends.

"I won't give up my place on the *Post*, Roly ; but I can work in some time on *Footlights*. You can rely on me, I'm glad we've met again."

Neither of them were demonstrative, but they were both glad.

"You'll come up to-morrow and see Nettie ?" said Roly, pausing, hat in hand, at the door.

"N—o, I think not."

"I'll guarantee she shan't say anything to annoy you."

"Don't press it, Roly. When I think how she flung her in Sinclair Furley's way, what she said to her, how she spoke to us both that night, I can't meet her. Some day, perhaps, not yet, not until I know what was the end of it."

"Poor old Sinclair ! why, damn it, he couldn't do anybody much harm ?"

"Dirty beast ! By the way, why hasn't he been writing for you lately ? I've noticed he's out of the paper."

Roly, with his hat on, came back into the room. He was the irresolute sort of man who always does come back into the room with a forgotten question or answer after he has made his farewell.

"But haven't you heard ?"

"Heard what ?"

"Sinclair Furley has joined the Salvation Army ; goes about the streets in a red jersey and a cap like a German band."

"He would always have done anything for an advertisement. I suppose he has the titles of all his show printed in front of his jersey?"

"No. He got awfully chaffed about Lucilla; you see, he had boasted, it seems, about her, his intimacy with her, and just at the same time there was fresh talk of a prosecution for an entertainment he gave in an unlicensed hall. He was fearfully slated too, in the press. He got hipped, wrote to all the papers that he had seen the error of his ways, found salvation, and had joined the 'Army,' with a vague promise that he would write his experiences. Some of them inserted his letter and there were editorial comments; not as many as he would have liked, but still some. That is about a month ago, and since then nobody has heard anything of him. I suppose he is really worming himself into their confidence, and will presently publish the 'Experiences of a Showman in the Salvation Army.' It's not a bad idea, you know. You always had your knife into Sinclair; I don't know why, he's clever and original. It might make a scene in a Musical Comedy, those red jerseys are rather picturesque."

"He is neither clever nor original. You think he is original, because you haven't seen the French *café chantant* singers he steals his ideas from. I am glad you've got rid of him on the paper; he is the very sort of man that, after a time, no public will stand. I should never be surprised to hear of him in Bow Street."

"Well, don't let us quarrel about him. I must go now; send me some 'copy' for next week,

there's a good fellow. We're short, as usual ; there has been no racing, none of consequence, at least. Ted is getting very shaky in his tips ; he has not had a winner for a fortnight."

"We must think of something new."

"Do ; good-night, old man."

"Good-night."

He was gone. Mordaunt went to bed feeling lighter hearted, happier than he had for many days. A trouble shared is a trouble halved. The time would come when he and Roly would talk freely about Lucilla, as yet Roly had not taken in what he told him. But he would.

Mordaunt had missed his work on *Footlights* more than he realised until now that he had it back again. Five years he and Roly had worked it together ; they had fought the uphill battle of a new paper and had conquered. It was his, or their, creation, and Mordaunt, now that his state of mind was more normal, felt his old interest in it revive.

In point of fact, he drifted back very nearly to where he had been before that eventful July day on the river. Very nearly, but not quite ; for in Roly's house, or in Nettie's company, he was not seen. And although he worked on *Footlights* again, and frequented his old haunts of pleasure, from the Gaiety bar to Romano's, from the Cormorant to the Aquarium, he was not absolutely content, he did not quite lose the sense of his responsibility, nor cease at times to have heartache and remorse, nightmare and acute depression over the fate of Lucilla.

CHAPTER XVIII

AND, meanwhile, what of Lucilla ?

Lucilla had rushed out of Mordaunt's room, out of his arms, urged by an instinct for which she had no name. Her cheeks were hot and burning, her heart throbbing loudly and fast. She rushed down the narrow staircase, out into the street ; the night-wind fanned her curls, she pressed her hand to her side, and ran on, on—into the night. She ran as if she were pursued, and pursued she was, by a fear that overcame her timorousness, and sent her forth alone to seek shelter in the streets from something more tangible than what she might find there.

She ran and ran until her breath failed, until the throbbing in her heart beat time to the throbbing in her head, until the cheeks that had been hot grew cold, and the Fear that from which she had run seemed to assume shape and substance in what she saw around her.

She came at last to Piccadilly. The moon was shining as brightly, was shedding as soft a light as it had done on the broad river, and the stars, in a silver network, were the same.

But what a different scene ! Here were women, women in brave apparel, in shining jewels ; women with painted cheeks and painted lips, haggard

women with dyed hair under feathered hats. Young girls, ~~ma~~ mature women, old women, talking, laughing shilly, begging. . . . for what? In silks and satins, rouged and powdered, under the quiet stars, not asking charity, accosting each passer-by with brazen speech and leer, offering . . . offering *What?* A dreadful scene under the pale moon and silver stars. God watching, nevertheless.

Three or four policemen, furtive smiles on the faces beneath the helmets, were trying to drive these human animals out of sight and hearing.

"Move on, now; move on, there; keep moving, please!"

"Come with us, bobby. That's right, bobby dear. Bobby's drunk to-night; he shan't come home with me."

"Never mind, he shan't go alone. I'll go home with him if he can't find no one else. What will his missus say when she sees what a nice girl he has brought home with him?"

"Now then, move on, keep on moving. Why don't you move on?"

No one heeded the policemen, they were there to perform an impossible duty; perhaps they tried to do it.

Young men, middle-aged men, old men, white-shirted, with opera hats, on the way from Club or theatre, on the way from nowhere, on the way to hell, were the centres of attraction. They were full of the small change of a coarse chaff, they even used their stick to keep at bay the tawdry creatures when they came too near, or laid inviting hands on

their immaculate linen. There were more old men than young ones in the crowd, men with gray hair and wrinkled eyes; and now and again some dreadful woman, painted, golden-haired, *gay*, would walk away with one of them, clinging to his arm, and her companions would shout :

“Good-luck to you, Sal,” and other words that had no meaning to the terrified girl amongst them.

How Lucilla had become one of this crowd she knew not. She heard vile thoughts put in viler words, she saw the men laughing with the women, and the furtively smiling policemen call out their monotonous :

“Move on ; can’t you keep moving ? ”

By her side a fair woman, young in years, asked her some foul question. Lucilla could only shrink back, and gaze at her with frightened eyes.

“*Are you saved ?* ”

The fair woman swore—a tract had been offered her. She thrust it back as if it stung her.

“Damn you ! now I shall have no luck to-night.”

When Lucilla looked for her again she was gone ; she had moved away quickly.

But now the same words were addressed to her :

“Are you saved ? ”

Two women, with long, blue cloaks, and poke bonnets with printed red ribbons, tracts in their hands, were offering their so strangely different wares. They offered one to Lucilla.

“Are you saved ? Have you found salvation ? ”

“No, no ; I am lost, lost,” she moaned, and caught hold of the long cloak.

"Come to Christ," they were quick to respond. "In Christ there is salvation, full and free. Do you love Jesus?"

"I don't know, I don't know! Help me, save me! It's true that I am lost, help me."

She clung to them, half fainting, while around her the gay crowd laughed and jeered, and chaffed.

"Do you mean it? Are you in earnest? Do you want to be saved?" asked the elder of the women quickly, eagerly, dropping her sing-song voice and stereotyped phrase.

For answer Lucilla clung to her tighter, her senses were reeling. She felt without understanding, the dangers and the degradation around her; instinct taught her the safety of those long blue cloaks.

"Take me away, take me away!" was all she could say, for the streets were thronged and fearful and she was incapable of running any further. Her strength had failed suddenly.

"We'll take you, never fear. We're in the army of the Lord, and we've got His rescue work to do. Hold on, help her, Patience."

They began to work their way out of the throng, bearing the half unconscious girl with them, but never ceasing to give away their tracts, never ceasing that question which they hoped would bear fruit, would go deep into some mind, and find an answer: "*Are you saved?*" They were assailed with ugly words, even with blows; feet were put forward to trip them up, and the white-vested young exquisites, in their double

capas and gardenias, did not refrain from lewd comment on their appearance, or an insulting suggestion.

They got away at last, aided, when possible, by the policemen, who had seen enough of their work to respect, at least, its purpose, and the strength and courage with which they carried it out. They got out of the "gay" crowd into stiller streets, where the moon could assert itself.

Half leading, half supporting Lucilla, they brought her at length to a sort of court, stone paved, which would have been a square, had not its fourth side opened into the streets. There were three tall rows of houses, high, built of stone; and into one of them, one no different from the rest, they helped the half-sinking girl.

"Make an effort, child," said one of the women to her; "it's a long way up. We'll help you all we can."

And they did; to good purpose, up the cold stone stairs, five weary flights of them. She could do no more for herself by the time they got to the top.

"Put her on to the bed."

Together they helped her there, where she lay for about half an hour in a curious, physically acute, but mentally barren state, gradually taking more and more interest in her surroundings, gradually becoming aware of each detail of the room to which she had been brought.

It was a depôt of the Salvation Army, where recruits came for three weeks' practical experience in rescue work under Captain Nelly's care and

guidance, prior to their admittance into the Training-Home at Clapton.

The room in which Lucilla lay was small and narrow, lit by a grated window. There was a bit of worn felt on the floor, a wooden table and three chairs, hard, cheap, wooden chairs, and there was another narrow bed in addition to the one she was upon. Opening into this room were two even smaller ones, each with a bed, a washstand, and a chair. Such was the entire establishment at No. 4, Newport Buildings, Drury Lane.

The two Salvationists who had brought Lucy home with them went down on their knees and prayed in colloquial, unpicturesque language, giving thanks for their success in this night's work. Captain Nelly prayed aloud, the other one joining in the refrain, saying "Amen!" rocking herself to and fro.

Whilst they were praying, two more women came in, similarly attired; long cloak, big bonnet, with the words "Salvation Army" printed on the ribbon in red letters.

"Any souls, captain?"

"We stormed the citadel, and one soul yielded, sister."

"A glorious victory! Let us sing a hallelujah," and she led the way, the others all joining in.

"On my knees I fall,
Give Thee up mine all;
To comfort live or die—
For my Lord crucify."

There were four verses of this hymn and they sang them all.

The girl who had been out with Captain Nelly pulled up the skirt of her dress, and showed a great, big, bleeding bruise on her leg, that some brute had given her as she passed. This was the signal for a fresh outburst of song. They all seemed to be of one mind ; the mind to pray and sing aloud.

“ I will be a soldier,
I will volunteer
To fight for Jesus
In the army here.”

And all the time Lucilla lay on the bed with open eyes, watching them, and wondering, but never speaking.

After, maybe, an hour of these devotional exercises, they all calmed down. They began to talk and exchange experiences ; congratulating themselves on the glorious time they had had. They said it had been a great victory that night ; all their ammunition was exhausted. They had given away all their tracts. And here on the bed was one enemy conquered ; one soul saved, one that had listened to their message.

Poor Lucilla !

Captain Nelly was a short, squat-figured young woman, of between thirty and forty. She had a big head, and her pale hair was cut quite short ; her face was large and square, colourless ; out of it gleamed a pair of light eyes, with a curious sparkle

in them. When she prayed they lit up her whole face; when she was not praying they seemed in monotonous accord with her heavy countenance.

The praying and congratulations over, she dismissed the tired recruits to bed.

Now these two were alone together, Lucilla, still in her white-flannel river-dress, with the cherished sailor hat, and Captain Nelly, the Salvation Army captain.

"How long have you been leading this dreadful life?" was the captain's first question. She seated herself on the bed. Captain Nelly had left humanity and its study far behind her in the desperate race for salvation; she only saw in Lucilla a girl rescued from the streets.

"Always," answered Lucilla simply, thinking of Nettie, of Marius. "I think I've always led a dreadful life." She was contrasting it with what she had heard to-night when the women prayed and sung hymns in sisterhood.

"Shocking, shocking! The Lord has wonderful ways and He has led you home now. But tell me who first led you astray; tell me how you came to take up the life," eagerly.

Captain Nelly was a saved woman herself, and leading souls to Jesus was her sole occupation in life, bringing the Gospel down to those who would not look up for it, forcing those who shut their ears to open them, and hear. But Nelly, who had given up all interests but this, as her corps demanded, who, in accordance with the Army's laws, read no newspapers, looked in no shop windows, took no

relaxation from her work, had forgotten in the general holocaust of self to sacrifice her feminine curiosity.

Nelly had never married, she had passed through childhood right up the tragic stream of ugly girlhood, ugly womanhood, longings for she knew not what, discontent, unhappiness, repining; into the safe harbourage of a religious enthusiasm, where her energies found outlet, and the passion that might have turned domestic burst instead into an hysterical fervour of love for Christ.

She meant well, she lived a blameless life, dashed with the excitement of monster meetings, glorified by the wounds she received in battle (such as the bruises shown to-night), made full by her work and her belief in it. But for all the blamelessness of her life, for all her earnest goodness of purpose, she blundered irreparably now, putting ugly imaginings into words that fitted them, blanching Lucilla's cheeks, taking away from her finally and for ever, her ignorance of sin and her innocence of thought; and all in the name of Christian purity.

Lucilla tried to answer the questions that her rescuer put to her; questions as to the life she had led. She did not know that Nelly was under a misapprehension, often she did not know to what she was acceding when she answered "Yes." But Nelly does not come from a mealy-mouthed class, nor from one who calls a spade anything but a spade.

Lucilla was asked about things of which she had never heard, and she was ashamed, falsely and piti-

fully ashamed of saying that she did not understand the questions.

If, trembling and terrified, she answered doubtfully to some point she could not grasp, the dangers she had escaped were pointed out to her in words whose meaning was so plain that without fully understanding she felt sick and faint. She sank on her knees and buried her face in her hands presently as Nelly left off examining her and started again praying for her, exhorting her to change her mode of life, to turn aside while there was yet time, before "Jesus put His finger upon her, as Cain was branded for another sin?"

As the dreadful night wore on, the fanatical woman, abandoning rest, gave herself up to the task she thought God had set her of rescuing this child. She worked herself up into a fervour of hysterical excitement, drawing a fearful picture of a life of profligacy, dwelling on its physical, as well as on its moral, degradation. Sinking on her knees she shrieked to Jesus to save this soul, praying, singing, shouting, with her eyes blazing, waving her arms, rocking herself to and fro, appealing, praying, until Lucilla, still mentally weak from the shock of her fainting seizure, sick and terrified, caught the hysteria, and joined her voice in prayer to the God to whom she had never before prayed to rescue her from a life of which she knew less than nothing.

The morning dawned in that little narrow room, its bareness cold in the struggling light, and saw those two, with pale, drawn faces and wild eyes, crying aloud for salvation. Captain Nelly was still

calling to Jesus to come down and help Lucilla, Lucilla now joining in her prayers, and entreaties. Nelly's fervour grew greater and greater, and the child's worked up with hers, until, more like maniacs than sane persons, they shrieked and stamped and gesticulated, flinging up their arms as if to clasp Him, kneeling with their faces buried as if to hold Him, until at last nature, unheeded so long, asserted her sway and they fell down in their places on the floor, passing gradually into the dreamless sleep of exhaustion.

CHAPTER XIX

At midday Nelly, after another short prayer meeting with the recruits, took Lucilla, numbed and quiescent, to the Rescue Home of the Salvation Army at Clapton.

They talked but little on the way. Captain Nelly was suffering from the reaction of her excitement of the night before. She felt that she had gloried too much over her victory over sin, her capture of a soul. Vanity had entered and shut out God; she was now full of repentance. She thought that at the next "holiness" meeting she would come out into the hall and kneel on the penitent form, and of how the colonels and majors would come to her, and with their arms about her try to comfort her, and remind her where she could find absolution. And then she would receive a fresh consecration, prayers would be offered up aloud for her, the drums would sound and the band would play, the red-jerseyed soldiers clap their hands and shout at her final victory over Self.

As for Lucilla, last night and all that had preceded it, Mordaunt and Nettie and the rest, had ceased to exist. Her temples throbbed, her limbs felt heavy, her brain had ceased to act, and her only conscious memory was of Marius! With difficulty she kept

her limbs from twitching, her lips from trembling. She thought it must be as she felt now that Marius had felt before his fits seized him. That was her real terror this morning, lest she should have an epileptic seizure in the street !

At length they reached the Refuge. It is a low house, old, with a long garden behind it, where once were trees and greensward, but now are clothes lines and wet linen. As they entered the door a close smell penetrated their nostrils and the girl turned a shade paler.

The hall was bare and narrow, not over clean ; opening from it were two rooms. Captain Nelly led the way into the first, a sparsely furnished office. A big ledger lay open on the desk. Terrible histories these entries showed. There was no one in the room, and Captain Nelly opened the book and turned over the leaves with gusto.

"Listen," she said, "there was hope for these. Listen to this." She read out a few terrible lines. "I knew her. She got beautifully saved here ; she's in respectable service now, and getting her sixteen pounds a year. But I must go and find the officer in charge, I don't know where she can be. She ought to be here. I won't leave you alone ; you'd best come with me."

Nelly was afraid her capture might escape. It is not unusual for girls entering these places for the first time to shy at the restraint, or change their mind about their conversion.

They went into the next room. It was full of girls and women ; some of them had babies in their

arms, wizened, dreadful babies. They were all knitting; the whirr of the machines joined the other sounds in Lucilla's head. At the moment of their entry, the clock chimed twelve and the matron, an anxious-looking, pock-marked woman rose:

"Ten minutes' private prayers!" she announced. The knitting machines stopped as of one accord. Down on their knees went all these outcasts, hiding their faces in their hands as the instructions bade them. God alone knows if they prayed, or where their thoughts wandered, but they had their opportunity. And the quieting of the machines helped Lucilla. She, too, knelt and covered her face.

When the ten minutes were over, the matron went outside with Nelly, and heard when, where, and how Lucilla had been found. And then these two good women enjoyed a short interjectional gossip of the horror of the lives these girls led, with phrases thrown in about the power of Jesus. Afterwards there was a little Salvation Army gossip; for the head barracks are in Clapton, and it was an open secret that "Mother," the colonel in charge, was about to wed one of the commissioners.

This gossip was a rest from their labours, it was all they ever had of recreation. From the religion of the Salvation Army all entertainments but "Variety" prayer-meetings are strictly prohibited.

Meanwhile Lucilla was left alone with these twenty or thirty girls and women, refuse of the London streets, left with them and classed with them.

They asked her questions ; her blue eyes, fever-stricken and anguish-haunted, gazed at them piteously.

"I don't know, I don't know" was all the answer she gave. Mordaunt's heart would indeed have sunk could he have seen or heard her. But there was no one there to help her and the pressure on her head seemed to be growing worse.

The matron returned. She told Lucilla to fall in-between with the others ; she said that to-day she was too busy to attend to her, but to-morrow she should be examined and special prayers put up to meet her case.

Downstairs, when they went to dinner, Lucilla became faint, the illness that was coming upon her sharpened to agony her senses of taste and smell. But she was able somehow or other to go through all the routine of the day ; to watch the washing, the knitting, to kneel with the others for private prayer ; to listen with them to an exhortation, very out-spoken, to God to guard them from relapsing into vice.

At last the day was over. Her bed was in a room with four others, they were narrow pallet-beds, each with its red counterpane, the words " Salvation Army " and the Salvation Army motto, " Blood and Fire," engrained in a ribbon device.

To undress before all these women, to get into one of these little beds, to sleep with one of these terrible counterpanes pressing on her—Lucilla could not do it. She looked wildly around her for some means of escape.

She made a sudden rush to the door, but many hands were put out to stop her.

"I must go, I must go!" she gasped, poor child, knowing not where.

"I felt like that when I first came," said a large-eyed skeleton of a girl, looking at her with something like pity, but standing, nevertheless, between her and the door. "It's a dog's life, the working and the praying, but it's better than the other. You're younger than me. Stay a bit - they won't let you go if they can help it. She'll catch you as you go out. Best stay; you'll get used to it. We'll go out together when I get stronger."

"They'll nurse you if you're ill," said another, who looked as if she wanted nursing already.

"Why don't you let her go!" called out a third. "Don't keep her off the streets; the street's the place for the likes of us. I'll go with you, my girl, I'm sick of this. The streets and public's, they're more cheerful. Out we'll go, this very night; they can't keep us, we've got the law on our side."

Lucilla's wild appeal for freedom had aroused the drowsing instincts in this unreclaimed one. Now she made a rush to the door, seizing Lucilla's arm and dragging her with her, but Lucilla shrank back.

"No, no!"

"Oh, I ain't good enough for you, I ain't." Her coarse features were inflamed with passion. "Well, you just shall come; we'll see about that."

She seized her by the waist, her hot breath was on Lucilla's cheek, her face so near that the eyes

seemed touching her, but yet it was the breath that did it, that encompassed and stifled her, preventing her breathing.

She did not see the other girls interfering, dragging away the haridan; she did not see the matron, roused by the noise, enter the room. She saw nothing but "*Blood and Fire!*" the legend on the counterpane. A hot air fanned her cheek, stopping her breath until her life seemed stopping with it, and she felt she must struggle for life, and breath, shriek for breath, for very life.

And shriek she did, and foam at the mouth; her slender form convulsed as she rolled on the bare floor of that poor room, her nails dug into the tender flesh of her palms, writhing and biting the dust, her fair hair dishevelled, and the unanswered appeal of the blue eyes changed into wild animal terror.

Poor Lucilla! Her birthright came to her in hideous form.

But she was with Christians. Unbelievers, Atheists, Agnostics, Reason-worshippers notwithstanding, the word still stands for Charity.

It was a terrible night in the Refuge. The spirit of revolt against decency and order, roused by the cry of Lucilla's assailant, spread rapidly in the congenial soil of the Home.

The matron saw with bitterness one by one of these lambs she thought she had led back to the fold become wolves again, untamed. She heard language that fell on her like reproaches, in that she had taught them no better; sentiments that

appalled her, insomuch as they seemed to show her a year of wasted teaching, wasted prayers. And through it all, through the girls struggling to get away from the Home, and the women struggling to hold them back, disorder, broken discipline, and hopelessness, Lucilla's terrible epileptic cry and writhing form was the dominant note.

This band of workers in unprofitable vineyards have a commander-in-chief; and at last in sheer despair they sent for her. The great Evangelist came quickly, and the light and fire about her subdued the girls and quieted the women.

Then she saw Lucilla, and at a glance decided that the Home, with its inflammable material, and smouldering elements, was no place in which she could be nursed.

She did, Mrs. General Booth, what few professing Christians in ordered and organised state-supported churches would have done. She took the struggling, mourning epileptic home with her, carrying her into the cab, carrying her from the cab into the house, that unpretending private house in Clapton where she dwelt with the founder of the Salvation Army.

When Lucilla awoke, to find herself strangely weak, without power or energy, she was in bed, a kind and gentle woman was by her side; there was nothing to tell her how she had come here. Nobody mentioned the terrible convulsion through which she had passed. She had not the complicating misery in her weakness that the memory of Marius would have evoked. The fit left her very

weak, very feeble, in mind and body. She took unquestioningly the care and the attention, but not ungratefully.

These strangers who had taken her in nursed her tenderly. They went about their day's work unweariedly, and spent the night watching by her sick-bed ; grudged themselves meat that she might have strong beef-tea, spared themselves what little comforts they had that she might have jellies, cool grapes, and custards.

In this household, self-sacrifice was as much a daily law as pleasure-seeking had been at 200, Southampton Row. The General, his wife and daughters ate meat three times a week and lived on tea and bread the other days ; they lived only to spread the Word. They may have been, probably were, fanatics ; but not more so than Christ when He preached in the Wilderness. Now that there was a stranger within their gates they managed to feed and nurse as well as pray for her ; mother, daughters, sons, going without food and without rest to nurse Lucilla through her illness, deeming such sacrifice no sacrifice in that they did it in the name of the Lord.

And their sacrifices and their lives were really an inspiration. The doctor who attended Lucilla accepted no fee from any member of the Army or inmates of their homes. He had watched them at their work, and knew the motives by which they were led. His connection with them, the aid he gave them in exposing one foul place in our civilisation, had nearly ruined both his reputation and his practice.

Dr. Strawood-Jones's name had once stood high among his medical brethren and his voice had been heard on many a council board. He did not go all the way with the fervent religionism of the sect, he did not argue on the matter of religion at all. But he took his stand on what he knew of the life and aims of the leaders of the movement, and when General Booth came to him, knowing him for a good man, and said simply: "We want a man, a man known in some other world than our own to do a deed for us that we cannot do ourselves, to prove that there is a trade being pursued in London that is a blot on our common humanity. If we prove it the law will help us; but the attempt may land the man who undertakes it in jail. Will you be the man?" Dr. Strawood-Jones never hesitated, although he knew what acquiescence meant to him. He accepted the censure of a narrow Judge, of a timorous professional clique, and he lives to show that conscience is a surer guide than popular clamour.

Under his care, and she could have had none better than the Salvation Army doctor, Lucilla slowly struggled back into life and consciousness, though the attack had left her almost as feeble in mind as in body, ready to depend upon anything that seemed a support.

Her old home appeared dream-like and unreal, a long way off. There had been nothing in it but a constant craving for pleasure, temporal and worldly pleasure. She had seen Marius die, but the death

of the idiot boy had not aroused her own spiritual life. For him there was no bright intelligence to be quenched, or beaming eye to be dulled; there had been no tears, prayers, or regrets for Marius.

But now, death, an "unsaved" death, was shown to her in a new light, as she lay weak, but recovering, on her little bed. A terrible picture was drawn for her, one from which she shrank appalled, to be delivered from which she prayed with them, shrinking and cowering in terror when the night came on. And all the time she was told, she was taught, that if she were "saved," that is, if she believed as they believed, took Jesus as they took Him, as her Lord and intimate, leaning on Him as a personal friend, fear would pass away from her, and that from which now she shrank in terror would appear as the entrance to a new and more perfect life.

It is easy to picture her mental state. As she lay there, often alone, for even for her they could not neglect their other duties, the thousands of other unsaved souls waiting for them, she thought of the Salvationists and all they had done for her.

They had taken her from the streets. She was no longer ignorant of what that meant; no innocence is allowed in the Salvation Army; all things are spoken of by their right names, sin is called sin broadly, and its consequences here as well as hereafter, physical, as well as moral, specified. Regardless of what depth it may have been from, they had taken her in; she had been ill, and they had nursed her.

Not strong-minded by nature or education she

saw these things, and no further. Whenever she thought of her old life, of her father's home, which was Nettie's home, she could not but feel there was no more any place in it for her. Whenever she thought of the people she was with, of Captain Nelly, who had rescued her; of Mrs. Booth, who nursed her; of Doctor Strawood-Jones, who doctored her, she was seized with a very passion of gratitude. And what could she do for them in return? Nothing; they asked nothing from her, they wanted nothing from her, but that she should subscribe to their doctrines, believe as they believed.

If only she could! It seemed to her it was a beautiful religion, and that they who preached it led beautiful lives. She heard of Christ and of His Sacrifice, and His power to save.

She thought of nothing but Jesus as she lay slowly recovering. And she prayed day and night, night and day. She had visitors, and they were all of one way of thinking.

"Are you saved? God bless you, my dear; if you could only get salvation, what a happy girl you'd be!" was the substance of what everybody said. And needing peace, even happiness, what wonder that she tried to obtain the salvation of which they all spoke.

They have a human, personal way of praying, these Salvation Army people. To many ears it sounds blasphemous but that was not the view Lucilla took. It is hard to explain the association of ideas, difficult to show the effect such method

of prayer exercised in the girl's mind ; impossible to trace the thought-cycle. But as she learnt to pray as they did, with a personal fervour, so, in her weakness, the fervour found her possessed by Mordaunt's image, that before then had been fading. Her cheeks would be dyed in darkness by the remembrance of him, and why she had left him ; she would long to see him once more. He would come between her and her prayers. That one long passionate kiss he had given her became mingled with all the passion of her personal prayers to Christ. The Christ to whom she prayed took on Mordaunt's features. She battled against this, feeling it wicked ; but in the end she yielded to it, and the praying and fervour solaced and helped her.

She got well eventually and the Booths were able to take her to one of their monster meetings. She went with them, she sat with them, these priests and priestesses of the religion, on the platform. They went as to a great feast, fasting beforehand, pitying her tenderly in that she could not enjoy it with them. Their tenderness and their pity moved her, and her throat was full of sobs, and her eyes of tears.

She wept, and, to hide her tears, knelt when they knelt, and sobbed, with her face in her hands.

The soldiers of the Cross marched into the hall in their bright red jerseys, playing their loud-sounding brass instruments, followed by a crowd they had attracted from the outside. They played, and suddenly the great congregation rose up, and joined in the song :

“I am a Christian soldier,
One of a noisy crew ;
I shout when I am happy,
And that I mean to do.

“Some say that I’m too noisy—
I know the reason why—
And if they felt the glory
They’d shout as well as I.”

Chorus.—“I’m a soldier;
Should you want me,
You can find me
In the Salvation Army.”

“They sing and shout in heaven,
It is their heart’s delight ;
I shout when I am happy,
I shout with all my might.

“I’ve Jesus Christ within me,
He’s turned the devil out ;
And when I feel the glory
It makes me sing and shout.”

Chorus.—“I’m a soldier,” etc.

The enthusiasm spread from the platform to the hall, men and women clapped their hands and shouted, one and all singing the chorus :

“I’ve Jesus Christ within me,
He’s turned the devil out,” etc.

Suddenly the song ceased, the music stopped, and there was silence in the hall. Mrs. Booth had risen in her place.

"Brothers," she said simply, and as she spoke she laid a hand on Lucilla's head, "here is a poor soul trying to struggle into the light. Can you help? God bless this meeting; if we can win even this one soul, the meeting is blessed. What shall we do for her?"

"Pray for her!"

"Sing for her!"

"Shout for her!"

"Clap hands for her! Jesus will hear!" were among the answers from the officers.

Mrs. Booth sank on her knees and set the example. On their knees, too, went all the congregation, and soon, led by the band, they were all singing, but still on their knees:

"Hark! the voice of Jesus calling,

Come, ye laden, come to me;

I have rest and peace to offer—

Rest, thou wretched one, for thee,

Take salvation—take it now, and happy
be."

The congregation and their leaders worked themselves into a spiritual frenzy bordering upon delirium. The instruments were clanged and the drums beaten. They called on Jesus to come down and help Lucilla; they swayed on their knees in their places, singing and crying:

“Sinner, heed the gracious message,
To the Blood for refuge flee ;
Take salvation—take it now.
And happy be.”

Poor Lucilla, longing for the rest and peace of which they spoke, yearning to feel as they felt, to shout and be happy, took the path of least resistance, yielded up her will.

“Is it coming ? is it coming ? ” asked the trumpet major. “Is salvation dawning ? ”

“I—I see a light ! ” she answered faintly ; and indeed a thousand stars seemed dancing before her eyes. The trumpet major had stooped, and she caught the words :

“She sees a light. Brothers and sisters ! she sees a light ! God be praised ; she sees the light.”

“Glory, glory, hallelujah ! Hurray ! Bravo, Jesus ! I knew He could do it. I knew He was at this meeting. She’s got it ; she’s got salvation ! God bless you ! God bless you ! ”

They rose to their feet, thronging around her with blessings and congratulations. Then they burst out singing again :

“We are Christian soldiers,
We’re a noisy crew ;
We shout when,” etc.

It was a glorious meeting, long celebrated in their annals, bringing money to their war-chest.

Afterwards they all shook hands with one another and many wept. Congratulations and a colloquial

rhapsody that might almost be called religious chaff wound up the meeting. " Didn't we tell you so, eh ? Didn't we say He could do it ? Ha, ha ! you've got Him now, and no mistake ! "

The girl was overcome with emotion ; she was sure she was going to be happy, she put away misgivings ; they were all so happy, and she *had* seen a light. . . .

Mrs. Booth led her from the hall, and told her what a splendid collection was the result of her sudden salvation and how it had worked upon their people.

Lucilla did feel happy at first. She saw the General himself that day. He had been away on a foreign mission. He was told now of the collection and of the enthusiastic meeting, and he, too, rejoiced in a fatherly way over her. At last she felt she had a family, a home, a purpose in life.

CHAPTER XX

CONVERSION accomplished, work and discipline began, and Lucilla very gratefully yielded implicit obedience. It was arranged that she was to have six weeks in the Training Home, and then be drafted to London to work in the very field whence she had herself been plucked. It was strange that her spirits did not sink at the notion. But her conversion was very recent. Hopes were held out by her companions that she would feel more and more the nearness of Christ. Just at present she rested on the fact that she had "got salvation," about which all her new friends seemed so pleased.

Salvation Hall, the Training Home, is an imposing building, situated at the end of a wide *cul-de-sac*. It is a divided building, one half for men, one half for women. It bears its title boldly in prominent letters, and beneath them is the Army motto, "Blood and Fire."

Lucilla entered, was presented with a uniform, was, as it were, given the freedom of the guild. The routine of the life was told her; she was shown her bedroom. In a large, high room, two rows of cubicles are erected, with one partition running along between them. The effect can be likened to nothing more exactly than the stalls erected for

animals exhibited at cattle-shows. In each stable or cubicle there is a narrow bed, two texts and a Bible ; the washing apparatus is outside.

In the Training Home were collected together twenty or thirty young women, ranging, perhaps from sixteen to thirty years of age, drawn from the ranks of the middle classes, daughters of professional men, lawyers, architects and clergymen.

They were girls who had "got religion " suddenly at a revivalist meeting, or girls whose dull provincial life had given the monly religion as pastime, girls and women who found in the music and excitement of the Army that something resembling dissipation which their lives had hitherto lacked. Some of them had been good daughters to widowed mothers and paralysed fathers ; but "Christ had called," and, forsaking home and all natural ties, they had left those homes desolate and those mothers and fathers childless, and had gone out at the call, glorious and willing martyrs to their religious or spiritual hysteria. There were even two or three young wives, who had left husbands and children at this same call. And all these young, hysterical, religious-mad young women, thrown together, acted and reacted upon one another under the extraordinary régime in which they were placed, until there were times when, instead of a religious assembly, an outsider might well imagine himself in some new and strangely managed institute for neurotics.

The superintendent, called "Mother " by the inmates, a highly-strung, delicate young woman, did her best to foster this spirit. The leading

motive in taking these girls into a training home is to teach them how to conduct a meeting. "Conducting a meeting" means simply working it up into that stage of excitement in which reason is entirely overcome and emotion exerts unlimited sway. To be able to "move a meeting" is a greatly prized quality; but it demands first the power of being personally moved.

Lucilla had had a fit of nervous excitement, followed by a violent epileptiform seizure. Delicate in health, in love, although barely conscious of the nature of her feelings, convinced now that love of man was evil, and only the love of Christ permissible, the passionate emotionalism of the sect seemed to set her spirit and her body free.

The girl was no hypocrite, although practising dissimulation. She knelt with her companions, prayed with her companions, fixed her mind, as she was told to do, on Jesus, His love and care for her.

Down on her knees, her eyes hidden, she would think of Him as King and Comforter and pray fervently. But her introspection was not deep or searching. She prayed to the Spirit of strength and gentleness. She knew only one who had been strong yet gentle with her!

So she lived out her six weeks, growing stronger, going through an extraordinary mental phase, feeding her heart and mind on love, practising religious exercises, but absolutely, although she did not know it, untouched by religion!

The time of probation being then over, she was sent out to sell the *War Cry* in the streets. It is

generally the first work entrusted to a recruit; by their success their fitness for further work is demonstrated.

Lucilla Lewesham had grown from her fair girlhood into a fairer and more exquisite womanhood. Her skin was like a wild rose, her grace remarkable, and even the unbecoming costume could not disguise it. The short-cropped golden hair persisted in curling, and the little rings lay on the forehead under the shadow of the big bonnet. Level brows and blue eyes, lips soft, full, and red showed when the bonnet was pushed back from the white forehead, and opening her sweet mouth she would cry :

“ *War Cry, War Cry?* ” and would push it into the hands of any passer-by.

She never went out without hoping that she would meet Mordaunt Rivers; she never went home without feeling that the next day might bring her that supreme moment. And yet her nature, childish still, although her emotions had grown to womanhood, kept her passive and obedient to orders, docile and attentive to her duties.

But one day, as she went out as usual to sell the paper, an incident occurred. It was November, already dusk, and as the girls turned out, six of them, to tramp the streets with their wares, six men on similar duty issued from the other side of the building. Even in the Salvation Army girls are girls, and men are men.

The two little processions stopped, they began to talk, separating into pairs. Lucilla found by her side a man red-jerseyed, sloping-shouldered, the Army cap slipping over his narrow forehead.

"Would it not be more interesting, more picturesque, if we worked together?" said a voice beside her.

She started at the voice in the dusk; she looked up, their eyes met.

"Good Heavens! it's the Madonna of Southampton Row!"

"Mr. Furley!"

"But how did you come here? Why, what has happened to you?" He was quite overcome.

"You won't tell anybody you've met me?"

"But I have longed for you!"

"Longed for me! You!"

"Yes, I; when you left me, when you preferred an empty-headed Philistine like Mordaunt Rivers to me, life became valueless. That was one of the reasons why I joined the Salvation Army."

"When I . . . when I preferred Mordaunt Rivers!" she stammered.

"When you went to live with Mordaunt. I am no purist, everyone must do as he or she likes with that which belongs to them, it is no one else's concern. I don't believe in morality or immorality, they are merely climatic expressions. In the East, for instance . . . but we won't talk of that now. But you had encouraged me to think you mine. I had thought of you as mine, and talked of you as mine. You behaved very badly to me; you will admit that, won't you?"

"I never thought of you," she said, with an extreme simplicity that almost amounted to cruelty. Sinclair's Furley's presence and Sinclair Furley's

words reminded her acutely of Mordaunt. "I never went to live with Mordaunt," she broke out piteously, after a short pause.

"You left Southampton Row with him."

"I know."

"Where did you go with him?"

"I ran away from him the same day, the same evening."

Her voice had the sound of tears in it. Could it be she was regretting that running away? she did not realise what regret she voiced.

"But when did this happen. *When?*"

"At once."

"Not the same night you left home?"

"Yes!"

"But how interesting. how extraordinarily interesting! You must tell me all about it. What did Mordaunt say or do? How did it come about?"

She burst into tears.

"I don't know, I don't know; I have never seen him since."

She longed for him in that moment; in that moment she had no pride; she wanted to know what Mordaunt thought, where he was.

Sinclair and she walked along side by side, to passers-by an uninteresting couple, a Salvation lassie and her comrade, two importunate *War Cry* sellers.

But Lucilla's blue-clad breast was heaving under its "Blood and Fire" ribbon, and Sinclair Furley was thinking how entirely agreeable and profitable an episode this might prove to him; how he could work it up, and make use of it.

Already he was tired of the Salvation Army. He had joined it in order to be talked about, now he wanted to get back to the world, and enjoy the result. But Lucilla Lewesham was here, and if it were all true that she had told him, if, indeed, she had left Mordaunt Rivers as she had said, how gloriously it would add to his return! His reputation as *un homme galant* would indeed be assured when it got about that Lucilla had run away from Mordaunt Rivers to him in the Army! What a romance was here!

Lucilla had been for some time now out of the reach of all normal or secular companionship; her mental food had been *War Crys* and *Little Soldiers*; all topics but religion banned and barred. She listened to Sinclair Furley with interest once she had recovered from the shock of seeing him, asking for news of her father, even of Nettie, of *Footlights*.

"And how did your play succeed?"

"My play! Oh, my little dance and song entertainment! Do you remember how I described the scene when Amaryllis was in the boudoir waiting for Corydon whilst he was in the garden dancing with glee at the thought of her prolonged expectation! It was an extraordinary invention. Ha, ha!"

This strange Salvationist soldier laughed aloud, and explained that the dance had been wonderfully suggestive. "Such a thing had never been done before. It took, you know; it was very widely noticed."

"It was a success, then?" she asked with interest.

"Well, you know, what is success? It was not popular, if that is what you mean, it did not suit the bourgeois mind, and it is the bourgeois who make popularity. I don't want to be popular; if a show of mine becomes popular I always know I have failed in expressing myself. Originality is never popular."

"Oh," said Lucilla, "I did not know that, I thought people liked new things. But I am glad it was well criticised."

"Criticised!" he answered with scorn. "What are criticisms? Bubbles!" He snapped his fingers. "They don't live. Who will read criticisms in ten years' time? By the way, though, the *Unfurled* had a very good notice; they have a very intelligent man on the *Unfurled*."

"I thought you used to write for it," said Lucilla innocently.

He very nearly blushed, certainly he grew a shade yellower.

"I? Oh no; I don't write for it any longer. Perhaps I shall again when I leave this."

He rattled his bundle of *War Crys*, and offered one to a little servant-girl with a beer-pot in her hand.

"Aren't you going to stay in the Army then?" Lucilla asked.

"No, no! What an idea! Why, really, it is too absurd; the knee-drill, the penitent form, and the band! But I shall use it, it is picturesque; the Sunday-morning marches through country lanes, with bands playing, and flags flying, the brown-skinned children with their wondering eyes

coming out to listen. It is very picturesque. It will make a play."

"But," she persisted, although timidly, "you are saved, aren't you! you found salvation here? you are happy now about your soul?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed the dramatist. "Ha, ha, ha! 'pon my word, that is very funny! I shall use that."

Lucilla was silent. She had not meant to be funny; but now that he laughed, the incongruity of Sinclair Furley and salvation struck her, and she pondered over it as they walked home together. Sinclair talked on, but she did not heed him; she was thinking about his soul, and what a strange offering it was to the Lord!

When they were within a few streets of the Home, Sinclair stopped.

"Give me your *War Crys*," he asked, holding out his hand for them. "I always leave them here."

"Where?"

She withheld hers, looking around her in astonishment.

They were alone standing on the pavement in a little narrow Clapton street. It was cold, it was late, and they had not disposed of their papers.

"Here." He pointed to a grating, a sewer-grating in the gutter of the road. "I plant mine here. Sow the good seed! Ha, ha, it is well manured! Let me put yours there, too; count them first; I must know how many pennies I have to refund."

She held her *War Crys* tight.

"It is very wicked; you are a hypocrite! I will not put my *War Crys* down the sewer grating."

CHAPTER XXI

HE could not persuade her to obtain a good name as a soldier by such means, there was nothing mean or underhand about Lucilla. She felt her old repulsion for Sinclair returning.

“ You will meet me at the same time to-morrow ? ” he said, holding her hand as they parted.

His soft and boneless hand pressed hers.

She went away without answering.

But that night, on her knees, her thoughts were confused, and the beautiful harmony was gone. She could not pray, but listened to the talk around ; it was all of Jesus, and salvation, of ambition for the saving of souls, and thanksgiving for personal sanctification.

She went to her narrow bed unhappy, and for the first time full of doubt. Did she believe ? Did she really and truly believe all she professed ? What had Sinclair Furley said to her, or what had his laughter done for her, that she could no longer pray ? She passed an uneasy night, wondering if she, too, were a hypocrite, and a troubled morning, perplexed by prayers that all at once seemed empty, hymns that had little meaning.

It was after dinner that the “ Mother ” used to exhort these young soldiers. Lucilla thought she

would wait until then, and speak to her, tell her doubts and troubles. For she knew that to "Mother" at least salvation was certain and Jesus a living force.

But the girl was shy of speaking of her feelings, reluctant, so shy, indeed, and reluctant of speaking of herself, that she had never even corrected the false impression Captain Nelly had given of the life from which she had been rescued!

Lucilla assisted in clearing away the dinner, took her turn in the washing-up. They did all the menial tasks by turns, as a discipline, and in that vast barrack of a building the work was not light. Then nervously she fell on her knees with the others in the room where the trestle-tables had been removed, and only the benches remained.

Twenty or thirty girls were on their knees in the large white-washed room, text-hung, echoing a pin-sound when the "Mother" and her lieutenant entered.

"We will commence by a hymn—number 172," she said, opening the little red hymn-book of the Army. "We will sing it standing up, please.

!
"Jesus, I my cross have taken,

All to leave and follow Thee;

Naked, poor, despised, forsaken,

Thou from hence my All shalt be.

Perish every fond ambition,

All I've sought, or hoped, or known,

Yet how rich is my condition—

God and heaven are still mine own!

“Let the world despise and leave me,
They have left my Saviour too ;
Human hearts and looks deceive me,
Thou art not like them, untrue ;
Men may trouble and distress me,
’Twill but drive me to Thy breast ;
Life with troubles hard may press me,
Heaven will bring me sweeter rest.”

They sang this all together, passionately,
“Mother ” leading. After each verse they sang
the chorus, their voices rising higher and higher :

“At Thy feet I fall,
Give Thee up my all.”

“All together. Now, then, sing it again ! All
who feel it hold up the right hand ; all who feel it
with all their hearts hold up both hands. Sing it
so, with both hands up. Make a joyful noise before
the Lord ! Laugh !

“Men may trouble and distress me,
’Twill but drive me to Thy breast ;
Life with troubles hard may press me,
Thou wilt give me sweeter rest.”

Now sing it clapping your hands. Once more ;
we will have it once again ! ”

She clapped her hands, keeping time as their
shrill young voices rose to heaven.

She was an earnest-faced young woman, with a
penetrating voice that resounded through a room

or hall. When, excited by the noise and the sound of their own voices, she arose to address them, they were all on fire. She knelt down after the singing was over and prayed aloud. She prayed that their hearts might cleave to Jesus, and their souls might be full of love for Him; that the love might overflow all other feelings, and drive out all other thoughts; that they would give up everything for their love of Jesus, sacrifice self on the altar; that they might cling to Him, and let the precious blood wash over them, and never loose their hold, but walk with Him, holding His hand and doing His commands. Then she prayed that for His sake they would go out and fight; not ashamed of their love, or hiding it, but always ready to talk of it, and to teach others the glory.

Now, suddenly as she had knelt she arose to her feet, and, with eyes upturned to the ceiling, sang out loud and dramatically :

“We’re marching on to war, we’re marching on
to war ;

We care not what the people think nor what they
say we are.

We mean to fight for Jesus, and His salvation
bring ;

*We’re blood-and-fire soldiers, and we’re fighting
for the King.”*

After that came the address.

“Be good soldiers, blood-and-fire soldiers, always
on the war-path ; ready with your bombardment,

your testimony of what this overpowering love has done for you. I want you to grow into real hallelujah captains, and for your work to be blessed."

Still standing she prayed that the "slain of the Lord might be counted in thousands through them"; and she prayed so fervently, so feelingly that their hearts were moved, and tears ran down their cheeks, whilst they longed for the fighting and the battle; longed for the day when they would go out from the Home, and lead in the fight as she was leading them.

When all hearts were beating for battle, she started singing again:

"Who will fight for Jesus?

Who will volunteer

For a lifelong service

In the Army here?

Who will fight the battle?

Who will face the strife?

Who will brave the hardships

Of a soldier's life?"

And, as if with one accord, and one voice, they answered with clapping of hands, in loud-voiced harmony as they had been taught:

"I will fight for Jesus,

Year by year, far or near;

I will be a soldier,

I will volunteer."

"Down on your knees, then." They dropped.

“Commune with your hearts ; get near to God. The orders have come ; are you prepared ? ”

They prayed silently. Afterwards she addressed them again, telling them their time of probation was over, their sojourn in the Home at an end. Now they must work, each one at her allotted task. Then she gave them the orders from headquarters. Some were to be drafted to one corps, and some to another. Those who were well and soundly saved were to return to their homes that their former acquaintances might see and follow their examples. Lucilla was to go to London, back to Captain Nelly, to work with her, to save such sinners as she had been herself, to show her grateful heart by leading other souls to God and the Army.

The next day saw Lucilla installed in the dépôt in Newport Buildings, sharing a room with a converted sinner from the mining district—a girl who could neither write nor read, but whom the Army had converted, and who was, in their own words, beautifully saved.

But Lucilla had been growing all this time, she had been developing from an ignorant, innocent girl into one who knew good and evil. The influences around her, so long as they had kept her excited, kept her to a certain extent satisfied. But since she had met Sinclair Furley she was no longer satisfied. Praying, fasting, singing, were empty exercises, and life itself was empty. Although she knew not where her instincts were leading, she felt that they were not leading her heavenward.

The brigade to which she was attached is what is known as the "Gutter, Slum and Garret Brigade." The members went out in the mornings into the very poorest houses, in the very lowest localities, and introduced the Gospel. At night they went on the streets, in Piccadilly and Regent Street, as they had done the night Lucilla was found.

Lucilla, unbelieving, uncomforted by the faith that on which they relied, shared in this work. She went into wretched rooms where drink and vice lived together, she gave away tracts and *War Crys*, she joined in choruses of "Hallelujah!" she went to Regent's Hall on a Sunday and sang :

" On my knees I fall,
Give Thee up mine all."

She went through all the routine, making no sign to those around her that the work lacked spirit. But there was one part of it that she dreaded, of which she once begged Captain Nelly to relieve her. That was the night-work. It was not that the vice shocked her, but . . . it attracted her !

Not the women, tawdry, coarse, loud-voiced ; not the traffic, bad, brazen, bestial. But there was something in these young men in evening-dress, with their flowers, something in these old men, their refined accent, their gloved hands, even their sneers and their sarcasm, that reminded her of Southampton Row, of her father, that aroused in her some form of home-sickness that climaxed always in a desperate longing for Mordaunt.

When she was on the streets, she thought constantly of Mordaunt Rivers ; she flushed when a man spoke to her, thinking it might be he. And many men spoke to her, for she was rarely beautiful, and growing in allurements. After these nights in the streets she slept badly, and often woke to find her eyes wet, her heart beating quickly ; Heaven a long way off.

CHAPTER XXII

THEN she met Sinclair Furley again and took a sudden resolve. She would speak to him, she would ask his advice ; she felt it was true, as he said, that she could not go on living like this. He would advise her, he would help her—he who, like her, had known such a different life.

She asked him to visit her and she was alone in the depôt when he came. The others were out on duty, hers was to prepare dinner for them on their return. When Sinclair came he found Roly Lewesham's fair daughter, in her Salvation Army dress and bonnet, preparing boiled beef and carrots for Captain Nelly and her recruits !

“ I am so glad you could come,” she said simply. “ so very glad, I want to speak to you.”

“ I could not come before. These absurd restrictions, these crude regulations and arrangements, interfered with me. But I have learnt enough now and I have found you again. I shall give it all up, this is my last day in costume.”

“ You are going back to Southampton Row ? ” she exclaimed.

“ I dare say I shall go there among other places. But what I am going to do at once is to begin my new play ; I must *exploiter* this new religion. It is

a good subject, and it has never been done on the stage nor in the halls."

It was one of Sinclair Furley's minor weaknesses to believe that all his ideas were absolutely original. Yet, as he leaned against the deal table in his red jersey and peaked cap, he did not give the impression of originality or genius. His narrow, sloping shoulders, his pale, fat hands looked neither strong nor impressive.

"Then—then do you really mean you are not—saved?" Lucilla paused in her cooking.

"Ha, ha! No, no! They are words, merely words. And their hymns! their dreadful hymns; they are not poetry at all. Ah! if only Verlaine could have written their hymns! I mean to use it like this" He was at his best now, serious and superficial. "I shall prove in my play that religion is not an instinct, nor a fact; it is simply a *bad habit*!"

"A bad habit?" echoed Lucilla, horrified, actually growing pale.

"A *bad habit*!" he repeated dogmatically, and with emphasis. Emphasis always took the place of argument with Sinclair. "I find among all these converts, among all these 'saved,' there have been Methodist or Evangelical fathers, mothers, grandmothers, or aunts; that the habit has been in the family. With the smallest temptation, the moment anyone reminds them that they have souls, the hereditary taint is exposed, and they relapse into religion, into a sensual abandonment to the idea of a future; they become like reclaimed

drunkards, a thousand times worse than they were before, sunk in this sensual religion,

"Sensual ? "

"But certainly, but of course. What else can you call it ? They are all sensualists, ascetic sensualists, their minds taking the place of their bodies." Sinclair delighted in antithetical phrases. "Do they ever talk of anything but love and future ease ? When the strife is over ! What strife ? you know well enough there is only one strife, that of sex."

He talked more on this theme, and Lucilla listened and grew soul-sick.

"To prove my point," he went on, "look at you and me. We are not in the least touched nor convinced ; we are and remain outsiders. The habit has never been with us nor our progenitors, it cannot be created. We went in Bohemian atheists. 'All the 'dipping in the fountain of light and of 'glory,' and the rest of it, leaves us Bohemian atheists ; our birthmarks are not washed out."

"Birthmarks of Bohemia ? " questioned Lucilla slowly.

"Yes, indelible."

"Birthmarks of Bohemia ! "

The alliterative phrase found an echo in Lucilla's mind, and made an excuse for her. She had run away from Southampton Row, fled from her lover's arms, consecrated herself to the service of God ? But it was true that she was birthmarked.

Birthmarked ! That was why she could not

really believe this creed she professed ; that was why she could not pray ; why the streets had a mysterious fascination for her and she thrilled under wanton glances that passed her companions unheeded. It was terrible. And yet there was a compensation in it. If it was her birthmark, then she must yield to it ; then she need no longer fight against her instincts, nor smother them ; then she too could put off this oppressive uniform.

"When you lower your face like that over the saucepan, I can just see the nape of your neck ; the curve is charming."

She raised her head from the stove and looked at him.

"You talk about my birth-stain, and in the same breath about my beauty ! Is corruption beautiful ? "

"But, of course. In decay, in corruption there is the greatest possible charm," he began.

"You talk, and I try to follow and understand what you say, just like I used ; but it is no use." She spoke with an almost passionate despair. It is true I was always an outsider. I wanted something to lean upon and I tried to get faith. Now you tell me of this taint in my blood ! I believe you are speaking the truth, that for me there is no salvation. What am I to do ? What *am* I to do ? "

And there being nothing in him to rise to such an appeal, he fell under it.

"You cannot believe in this God to whom they play the drum," he answered with conviction ;

"you cannot love Christ, the abstraction ; but you need to love, every beautiful woman needs to love. You can love me."

He advanced to her, held out his hands.

"No, I cannot ;" and she retreated from him nervously.

"But," he persisted, "why not ? why not ? There is nothing else in the world but love, it is the meaning of everything, the kernel of art. The love of the man for the woman, of the woman for the man. Religious love is for the ugly ; it is the effort of the imagination to feed the senses."

He did not care that he was illogical ; he warmed to Lucilla as he spoke. There was only one way for such an adventure as theirs to end.

He took her reluctant hand in his. Her sleeves were rolled up above her elbows and showed her white arms ; it was to allow ease for her cookery operations. A feeble access of passion came over him.

"But you are beautiful ; you are really beautiful," he said. "We shall make an astonishing couple."

She put up her hand to pull her bonnet over her face, an involuntary gesture of modesty. The bonnet fell back, hanging to her neck only by its strings, the lovely face was uncovered.

"Charming ! charming !" he said again, his artistic appreciation genuinely moved.

She had posed for so long, unconsciously perhaps, but none the less posed, as the "repentant sinner"

that even Sinclair Furley's words and looks brought a glow to her cheeks and a momentary sensation of pleasure.

"I want to kiss you. I have never kissed you," he said, as he drew nearer to her. Then, before she could draw back, he caught hold of her, and his lips touched her cheek in lieu of the quickly averted mouth. Her purity, lost in thought, but still retained in deed, revolted.

"Did you mind?" he asked curiously. He had an analytical way of making love. She had been really only repelled, but did not understand her own sensations.

"I don't know."

The distorted femininity of his nature made him rejoice in her shrinking and obvious distaste for his embraces.

"You are so charming, so original! You understand that I love you?"

"No, no!" This was not the love for which she had been yearning. "I don't love you."

"You do not love me?"

But the mere words, the weak caress, the instinct she had to discuss love with him, seemed to her as an ashamed admission of the birth-stain of which he had spoken.

And then there rushed into her mind the thought of Mordaunt, from whom she had fled, of Mordaunt, who all at once she knew was the only lover she would ever take. And yet in that sudden flush of knowledge she was glad that he was not here, glad he did not know the wanton

thoughts that had arisen so often for the kisses she had not had and the arms that had loosed her too soon.

"I love you," said Sinclair Furley. "We must marry."

"Marry—marry you?" she stammered.

"Yes, yes. We will leave the Army together, or we might be married in the Army; it would make an enormous sensation; it would be in all the papers!"

The idea excited him and he pressed the matter urgently.

He had visions of a platform marriage in Exeter Hall. He saw the streets placarded with the announcement, himself in uniform and cap, with the beautiful Lucilla by his side, marching to the sound of music; literary, artistic and journalistic London for audience.

Lucilla's strangely-born adolescence left her extraordinarily humble. She no longer thought herself worthy of Mordaunt Rivers. But she knew that she loved him. Her strongest desire now was that he should never know it.

She wished suddenly, at all risks, at all hazards, to put a barrier between herself and him. Sinclair Furley was urging her to marry him!

That was why she said "Yes," moved she hardly understood by what impulse; to keep Mordaunt Rivers from knowing that she loved him, perhaps.

"If you really want me, I will marry you," she said irresolutely, timidly, and submitted to his kisses, to his mucilaginous personality.

And then they heard the sound of voices on the stairs.

“ We will march through the world
With the fire and the blood ;
Lord, the power and the glory are Thine.
When we’ve turned guilty sinners
By millions to God,
Like stars in the heaven we’ll shine.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THAT evening Sinclair Furley, discarding his uniform, went to Caroni's, where he knew he would find his brother.

Caroni's is a restaurant in the Strand. It was the fashion for the staff of *Footlights* to foregather there of an evening, to collect anecdotes, to chaff the ladies who lounge in the bar, to sample drinks.

It was early in the evening when Sinclair arrived. His brother Tom was lounging against the counter, endeavouring to derive humour from the somewhat flat operation of "getting a rise" out of Mrs. Caroni. From such an occupation he turned gladly to his converted relative.

"Hullo, old man! How comes it that you are without your uniform? This will never do. I shall have to report you."

Sinclair was ill-dressed in a short coat, with light trousers, and a red necktie. Tom, big, black-haired, and untidy, had reached the point at which untidiness merged into uncleanness.

But they were good friends, these two brothers, notwithstanding their unlikeness, and tolerant of each other's weaknesses.

"I have left the Army."

"Left the Army! Dear, dear, what a misfortune for the Army!"

"Be serious a moment, Tom ; I have something important to tell you."

"Then you must stand me a drink. I can't listen to any of your stories under a bottle of 'the boy.' Here, Beauty! Pommery &c, and hurry up."

"You remember Roly Lewesham's daughter?" Sinclair began, even before the wine was uncorked.

"Your 'distinctively virginal' maiden, who bolted with Mordie Rivers?"

"No, no, she didn't. Do listen! She has been with me."

Tom stared at him a moment, then burst out laughing, throwing back his big head, peeling it out heartily and unconstrainedly.

Irritated, and trembling with anger, Sinclair said:

"What are you laughing at? What are you laughing for? You are growing coarser than ever. Can't you listen?"

"Oh, I'm coarse, am I? And Roly's daughter preferred you to Mordaunt Rivers? I can't help laughing; but there, go on, old man, and keep your hair on! I am all attention."

"She never was with Mordaunt Rivers, she joined the Salvation Army when I did. I am going to marry her. I shall use her experiences as well as my own: 'A Refuge in the Salvation Army.' 'With the Colours'—I don't know yet what I shall call it. It will make a splendid play; there was any amount of singing I can work in, and dancing too. I think I shall take the 'Leggeries' for a

season, and run it myself. It is bound to be a great success; we might get a syndicate to do it."

"They are rotten titles," said Tom, more frankly than elegantly, staring at his brother curiously. "Who on earth cares about the Salvation Army, a lot of howling vulgarians! What do you mean about marrying? You are not a marrying man."

Sinclair flushed.

"Why should I not marry? I swear I won't stand your innuendoes."

"All right. But you've got funny ideas of enjoyment," Tom answered drily. "How are you going to support her? Although I suppose you have been saving money lately?"

"What has money to do with it? your mind is really vulgar."

"Do you think Roly is going to keep you? You could make a living at the singing and dancing, if you'd moderate it a little. Yours is a fun game for a gentleman. I suppose we are gentlemen, by the way; the governor was."

Before he had time to say more they heard a noise outside, a knot of men talking in thick and excited voices burst open the glass-door, and practically the whole staff of *Footlights* came in.

Ted Smith was drunk, he had a woman on his arm and it was easy to guess where he had found her. Two or three others of the same class followed them in; in a moment the whole place was in an uproar. Drinks were called for, devilled sardines and grills of various kinds. The waiters and the

little Italian proprietor ran about distractedly ; all was confusion.

Roly and Mordaunt Rivers were with the crowd, Roly just sufficiently intoxicated to be noisy. Mordaunt leaned against the counter watching the scene. He was beginning to look middle-aged, now there were lines about his eyes.

"How are you, Roly ? I've been through a remarkable experience since we've seen you—remarkable. I must tell you all about it." Sinclair was pleased to meet his future father-in-law, he was full of his news.

"Hallo ! So you've turned up again, like a bad egg. He looks a little like a bad egg, don't he, Rivers ? You have been collecting details for a new 'Maiden Tribute,' they tell me. It will just suit your peculiar style. Here's luck to his new venture, boys."

Roly tossed off his glass and made another remark or two on the same lines ; broad lines ! He insisted upon drinking Sinclair's health, and he made the temperate realist drink with him.

The word and the wink passed round quickly. Everyone now insisted upon drinking Sinclair's health and no one would hear of Sinclair refusing the toast. As his weak eyes got bloodshot, as his talk grew thick and boastful they became more insistent.

"Let's make him blind, paralytic ; we shall hear something then," whispered Roly, never dreaming what he was to hear.

Tom did not interfere for his brother's protection.

Tom had a weakness for free drinks ; he joined in the sport, and toasted his brother with the others.

The fun grew fast and furious. The women now began to jest with Sinclair ; and Sinclair, his timidity vanquished by the wine, flattered and overwhelmed by his welcome, drank with them all.

Mordaunt watched the scene with a quickly growing disgust.

"She is the first lady who has ever loved you, isn't she ?" he asked Sinclair, with a smile that scarcely concealed his contempt, as one of the miserable creatures flung her arms around Sinclair's neck, and held the wineglass to his lips.

"Drink it up, and I'll kiss you," she said ; "you shall have a kiss for your pluck."

"No, no, indeed she is not," stammered Sinclair, as he drank the liqueur she proffered, and staggered to his feet to claim the promised reward.

"No, she isn't," he went on with half-drunken gravity ; "there's Lucilla, the lovely Lucilla. No, no ! Go away, woman, don't tempt me. I must be faithful to my Lucilla. I am going to marry Lucilla."

"You blackguard !" Mordaunt made a quick step toward him, but Roly intercepted him.

"He doesn't know what he is saying ; he is as drunk as a lord. Leave him alone," he said hurriedly.

"Lucilla ! who's Lucilla ? Tell us all about her," asked Ted, who had forgotten, if he ever knew, that that was the name of Roly's daughter. "Tell us how she loved you, where she loved you, when she loved you ; spit it out, old man."

"No, no, it's a secret," he said with drunken gravity, nodding his head toward Roly, "it's a secret. I know where she has been all this time, ha, ha!" There was an attempt at his old laugh, interrupted by a hiccup.

White and sober went Roly's face as he noted Mordaunt's. The men went on questioning Sinclair; the name "Lucilla" meant nothing to the majority of those present; they had scarcely heard, certainly barely remembered the name of the shy and silent girl who had for a few weeks haunted Roly's festive house. The bare idea of Sinclair Furley and a girl tickled their fancy. They drew him out, and he deprecated and chuckled loosely, implying much, if saying little, entertaining them vastly.

"Wait until we can get him away from these fellows," Roly begged Mordaunt in a quick undertone; "they don't know of whom he's talking."

"I'll wring his neck in another moment."

"Do. But wait; they'll turn on to something else presently, and we'll get him away and question him; there is no good making a fuss for her sake, Mordie, for mine, don't go for him now. Don't have a row here."

Through the fumes of wine and smoke, amid these hot and drunken men and women, there came to both men a vision of the girl, her sensitive lips and blue pleading eyes.

Mordaunt saw the justice of Roly's plea, although rage was in his heart and his hands were tingling for Sinclair's throat. He could almost feel the

repulsion as the soft flabby flesh yielded under his grasp.

"Let me go. Let me get at him!" Roly held him by the arm.

Fortunately there was a diversion. A glass door leads from the shop to the entry of the private rooms, through this Ted Smith caught sight of a man in whom he thought he saw a sneaking desire to pass without notice.

"Hullo, Bill!" he shouted, and flung an empty champagne bottle; it went smash through the semi-transparent panels. The gentleman, who did not happen to be Bill, burst through the damaged door and resented the assault in a muscular manner; there was a fresh uproar, and the proprietor hurried to the scene. The newcomer hit the wrong man, and gave Tom Furley a black eye for Ted Smith's transgression. This added to the general hilarity. They all joined in the free fight that ensued. The insult, by the way, was finally wiped out with more glasses. The gentleman, whose name was not Bill, found himself in congenial company, and the lady with him was not really embarrassed at being seen here. Ted promised to pay for the repair of the glass-door—promising to pay was an amiable characteristic of Ted's; and the night set in wet.

Mordaunt got out of it as soon as he could. He walked up and down the street with Roly, until Sinclair, staggering, uncertain in his steps, talking loudly, incoherently, reeled out, two or three young men guiding his way, encouraging him in the talk which Mordaunt could feel was still of Lucilla.

"No, no, no. I'm not goin' to give you her 'dress. It isn't likely ; I know better than to do that. Yes, of course I'll ask you to the wedding, mean to ask everybody. Ha, ha !"

Mordaunt exchanged glances with Roly, then he took his resolution quickly.

He joined the little group ; none of them were quite steady enough to know or question how he came to be amongst them ; naturally they let him into the joke.

"There, you fellows," said Mordaunt as quietly as he could, "he's all right. You can leave him with me. I'll see him home, I am going that way. And if he lets out anything more entertaining, I'll let you know it in the morning. You'd better see each other home ; it is very nearly the day after to-morrow, so you can't complain you've not had enough of it."

"Take him carefully, he's a valuable party ; for his Lucia's sake we can't let anything happen to him," said one.

The laughter rang out again. Mordaunt put his arm into Sinclair's, and piloted his unsteady but resisting steps. Roly took his other arm.

Sinclair was for going on with the conversation ; he could not quit the subject.

"Hold your tongue," said Mordaunt sharply, "you've said enough for one night."

Sinclair stared at him vacantly, and said no more.

CHAPTER XXIV

THEY went home with him, he was just able to give them his address, Mordaunt and Roly took him up the two pairs of stairs and into his rooms. Then Roly left the matter in Mordaunt's hands. Mordaunt half led, half pushed him into an arm-chair.

"Sit there," he said roughly.

Sinclair's head fell gently forward.

"Quite comfortable, very gentlemanly, you can go now, I'll get to sleep."

"Beast!" ejaculated Mordaunt.

Sinclair Furley sober was not an attractive person and it may be imagined what sort of a sight was presented by Sinclair Furley drunk. The loose jaw fell, the thick lips no longer concealed the decayed and yellow teeth; the hair tumbled over his half-open bloodshot eyes.

"Beast," said Mordaunt again with emphasis.

"What are you going to do?" asked Roly, as if it were Mordaunt's affair and not his.

Mordaunt turned on him savagely.

"I am going to get the girl's address from him. I want to know where she is and what she is doing. Of course he is lying, but I am going to get at the truth. *You* may be satisfied to leave her in the

hands of a thing like that"—he made a gesture of utter disgust towards Sinclair—"I am not."

"I shan't give you her 'dress; shan't give her 'dress to anybody," mumbled Sinclair, who seemed to have heard or understood, notwithstanding his condition.

"But we shan't be able to get it from him now," answered Roly. "Wait until to-morrow, or have him followed; not that I believe he has it. There may be other Lucillas. It is not such an uncommon name."

Mordaunt gave Roly a contemptuous glance and said :

"Let us do any damned thing that will relieve you of responsibility is what you really mean, I suppose." He stood over Sinclair, he took him by the throat.

"What are you doing? Don't throttle the man."

"Mind your own business," answered Mordaunt sharply.

Sinclair seemed to have fallen asleep. Mordaunt's hand on his throat tightened :

"Leave go, leave go of me," he struggled feebly.

"I'm going to wring your neck; keep still, or I shall strangle you. What's Lucilla's address, where is she now, you blackguard."

"Her 'dress, lovely Lucy's 'dress? That's my affair, that's entirely my affair. . . ." He was preternaturally solemn, and shook his head. Mordaunt's grasp tightened, he looked dangerous.

Roly interfered again when he saw Sinclair had left off struggling, was growing purple in the face.

"You're killing him. Good God, man, think of what you are doing! Are you mad?"

"Mad? Yes, I believe I am mad." His face was white and his eyes sombre: he shook him as if he had been a dog. Roly had actually to pull him off.

"Give him a chance, he can't speak while you're throttling him." Mordaunt recovered himself, fell back.

"He shall tell me, I'll kill him if he doesn't speak. Why did you not let me finish him?" he said. "I should have deserved a medal from the National Vigilance Society if I'd killed Sinclair Furley."

"I was thinking of you and not of him," answered Roly, "he isn't worth being hanged for. Clear out of his sight a minute, let me have a try."

Mordaunt moved away reluctantly.

He tried to realise what it would mean to him if he heard that the girl had fled from his arms, not from fear, not from modesty and maidenly alarm, but with treachery and some perverted instinct, to Sinclair Furley!

Roly had some experience in dealing with drunken men.

"Here, Furley, wake up, man, we want another drink. Can't you find us anything? Let us have a jolly evening together."

"Yesh, yesh, a very jolly evening."

"Where do I find the lush? Give it a name."

"In the cupboard; there is whisky in the cupboard. I'll get it myself. There's nothing the

matter with me. Who said I was beashtly drunk ? ”

He staggered to his feet, but would have fallen had not Roly helped him.

“ No, no, old man, I’ll get it ; you sit still.”

He turned his back to him as he went to the cupboard but went on talking.

“ Quite right of you not to give the girl’s address to-night, whatever the other fellows may have said. I always did think you were a man of honour. It isn’t as if they were such pals of yours either. Which do you take, a wee ‘ drappie ’ of Scotch, or some ‘ three star ’ ? ”

He mixed him a stiff tumbler of whisky, with a very little water, then came back to the chair.

“ Here you are ; as I was saying, it isn’t as if they were pals of yours. You wouldn’t give anyone but me the address ; and quite right too. I should have been awfully annoyed with you if you had ; and so would Lucy.”

“ So would Lucy,” hiccoughed Sinclair, spilling the drink as he raised it to his lips ; “ lovely Lucilla. But how do you know ? Who told you ? It’s a shecret,” he exclaimed suddenly.

“ Who told me ? Well, that’s good ! ”

“ I’m going to marry Lucilla.”

He had got the contents of the glass down his throat, and woke up again.

“ The General will marry us himself. You’ll come, Roly, everybody’s got to come to my wedding. You’ll be the best man ? No, no, can’t be best man, you’ll give her away. Father can’t be

best man, forgot that. You're not like anybody's father, Roly—Roly Lewesham! I don't understand it. . . . Father Roly. Put you in a—is it cassock or hassock? Roman father, you know, good joke that. I say, fill that glass again, I'm still thirsty."

"Why hasn't she changed her name?" asked Roly suddenly.

He had winced when Sinclair alluded to his fatherhood, but he meant to prove to Mordaunt his skill in getting the information he wanted.

"Change her name? Why should she change her name, she'll have my name next week. She's going to stay at Newport Buildings until next week. Captain Nelly's looking after her—my lovely Lucilla!"

Mordaunt came back, but again Roly restrained him by a glance. He was so near getting all they wanted. He frowned to him not to interfere.

"But you won't be able to see her in the morning. Shall I give her any message from you?"

"Tell her 'bout that girl to-night; she put her arms round me. No, she'll be jealous; don't tell her; tell her I'm too . . . schleepy to . . . to talk." His loose head fell forward; in another moment he would have been asleep.

Hastily Roly said:

"All right, I'll give her your message; No. 7, Newport Buildings?"

"Twenty-six. I must lie down. . . . I'm so schleepy . . ."

"Lie down and be damned then!" wound up

Roly, turning away. "We've got all we want, I told you I'd get it from him. What are you going to do?"

"I should like to kick him before I do anything else."

"Oh, leave him alone; he'll have hell in the morning, and he can't drink his bath, because it's ten to one against his having one."

Then they got out of the room, and Mordaunt drew a breath of relief. Roly avoided his eyes.

"It's very rough on you," he said at length.

"Don't think of me; I am not thinking of myself, I am thinking of the girl. I don't understand it now. What had he to do with it? There is something queer about it. You'll go and see her?"

"Of course. I'll go the first thing in the morning."

"If, if she should want to see me. . . ."

Mordaunt's voice was curiously low, and he was feeling it difficult to express himself.

"Leave it to me. I'll tell Nettie the whole story; you don't like Nettie, but she's got a good head on her. Nettie has never believed that Lucy wasn't with you. I'll tell her to-night."

"You'll take her home if she wants to come . . . whatever has happened?"

"Yes; it will be all right now, Nettie will be all right. She's got over her temper; she's not a bad sort at bottom."

"Good-night."

"You're not going?"

Mordaunt left him abruptly. In truth, Mordaunt's

capacity for concealing his feelings was nearly at an end. He thought of the scene at the restaurant, of the spectacle of Sinclair at his rooms; he remembered the shy, first yielding of Lucilla's girlish lips. He wanted to be alone.

Roly told his story to Nettie when he got home. Nettie was quite willing he should go to Newport Buildings.

"She has never been near Mordaunt. She's been in the Salvation Army with Sinclair Furley; he says they are going to get married."

Nettie laughed, her memory was a short one, her temper irrational and spasmodic.

"Go and look after her if you want. She can come back here if she doesn't get in my way, there's room enough."

It was twelve o'clock the next day when Roly set out for Newport Buildings; he did not find them without difficulty. In the end a policeman directed him.

"Yes, sir, first turning on the right and second on the left. Salvation Army quarters? They are on the fourth or fifth floor. Anybody will show them you."

And sure enough there was the building and a small boy, any number of small boys, to direct him.

"There you are, sir, you go along till you gets to it."

Up the five pairs of stairs went Roly, lightly at first, less so as he neared the fifth floor.

"God, it doesn't look like affluence!" he exclaimed, as he noted the bare stone stairs, the pauper

smell that hung about the building. He was really nervous about the meeting with his daughter. He did not believe, or hardly believed, that she had been all this time with Sinclair Furley. But he could not guess how he would find her; the whole thing was an enigma to him—one that he hesitated at solving.

Yet of all the situations he imagined none approached the reality that met his gaze, as without knocking he opened the door, and stood on the threshold.

He found himself in a small, bare room, a little bed in one corner, a deal table pushed against the wall. In the middle of the room four women were kneeling, in dark blue uniforms, a red ribbon round their bonnets. They were more than kneeling, they were almost grovelling on the floor, rocking themselves to and fro, their hands before their faces, chanting in chorus:

“ On my knees I fall,
Give Thee up my all.”

“ I beg pardon,” he stammered, “ I have come to the wrong room.”

He would have retreated, he was on the point of going away again, when one woman rose hurriedly. Under that bonnet gleamed a face he knew, fair, though not so childlike as he had seen it.

“ Father, father ! ” she cried and ran to him.

All the past she had forgotten, all the sorrow, and the shame; the mysterious blood-love moved

her ; up from the Father in heaven she sprang to, her father on earth.

“ Lucy, by God, it’s Lucy ! ”

The ready tears started to his eyes ; he kissed her, held her close to him ; for the moment forgot the scene he had interrupted, her dress, the whole mystery of the situation.

Then it flashed into his mind where Sinclair had been these months. Repelled, he drew back from her.

“ So it was true that you followed him into the Salvation Army ? ” he exclaimed, dismayed.

“ Yes,” answered Captain Nelly for Lucilla, whose sensitiveness had already taken alarm at her father’s expression. “ He said ‘ Arise and follow Me,’ and she obeyed the voice. Glory, hallelujah.”

Roly stared at her ; his wit for once at fault.

“ What does she mean ? ” he asked, staring from his newly-found daughter to Captain Nelly, from Captain Nelly to her recruits, and again to his daughter. “ Who is she ? what does it all mean ? ”

“ Captain Nelly rescued me from the streets,” she repeated mechanically. She had heard it so often the words had lost their meaning.

“ From the streets,” repeated Roly dully.

“ Yes,” she answered simply, although blushing, “ I ran away—I ran into the streets ! I had nowhere to go. Nettie said she would not have me in Southampton Row any more. They brought me here. After that I was ill, and they nursed me. I have been with them ever since.”

“ Praise His name ! ” ejaculated Nelly, and the

recruits echoed her. She had been listening with interest to Lucilla's halting story, and missed in it the salt of Biblical quotation.

Lucilla's eyes questioned her father's, asking mutely for forgiveness, comprehension ; the warmth of his human love seemed more precious to her in this moment than all the life of faith and renunciation.

"Who told you where to find me?" she asked.

"Sinclair Furley," he answered, and was embarrassed.

"It is time to go out now," interrupted Captain Nelly; "but you stay with your father, and we will work the vineyard alone. Try and bring the truth home to him; be faithful to your Master." Lucilla felt instinctively the effect Nelly's words would have on her father, and glanced at him nervously.

His lips had a humorous expression, but he said nothing until with a parting "God be with you," in their long cloaks the women and the girls sallied forth together singing

"Only the blood can save us."

As they went downstairs they sang and their voices floated back.

Then, when even their voices could be no longer heard, Roly turned to Lucilla.

"Can't we sit down and be a little more comfortable?" he asked. She drew a chair up to the fire for him, and stood before him, like a culprit.

"Take off that revolting head-gear." She obeyed, him, and then he looked away from her.

"Well," he said at length irritably, for her attitude made him conscious of his own shortcomings, "I suppose you'd better tell me all about it."

"There is so little to tell."

"How did Furley come into it?"

"He asked me to marry him, and I said 'Yes,' " she answered simply.

"He hasn't been keeping you?"

"What!" she raised her head, and read the meaning of his question in his expression.

"She burst into tears and turned her face from him. She was abased by the question, it seemed to bring home to her again the indelibility of that birth-stain. That her own father should think such a thing as this of her! Her own father!

And Roly, tender-hearted Roly, could not bear to see her cry, to see her slender frame shaken by the sobs that broke from her.

"Don't, don't, Lucy; don't cry. You couldn't help it; I am sure it wasn't your fault. I don't want to know anything, I won't ask any more questions. It's in the blood, I suppose. Don't cry; I'll see you through, I swear I'll see you through."

She left off crying after a while. She wanted to explain everything, but was afraid of her own words. She could not bring herself to speak Mor-daunt's name. How could she tell her father why she had left him, or that she loved him? He must never know that; no one must ever know that.

"Come home," said Roly at length; "if you

"must marry the fellow, you had better do it from Southampton Row. I can manage Nettie."

"There is no must about it," she said, the blood burning in her cheeks.

"Look here," said Roly desperately. "I don't know what to think. You ran away from Mordaunt and went on the streets. Why? why? why? It seems impossible when I look at you, incredible. I don't half believe it." He too got red; it wouldn't bear thinking about. "You met Sinclair and agreed to marry him?"

"I was in a Refuge first."

Roly winced under that.

"Why did you ever leave Mordaunt? He went all to pieces over it. I never saw a man so knocked over. When does Sinclair come into the story? For God's sake, try and explain yourself!"

"I met him when I was at the Training Home. I saw him twice. He asked me to marry him. I thought I couldn't live always like this, so I said 'Yes.'"

"When was this?"

"Yesterday."

Roly was relieved, although he was still puzzled. Someone else must clear it all up, if it ever was cleared up.

"You'd better come home with me," he said. "You'll find Nettie all right."

The doors of Bohemia were open to her, laughter and music and love. Her thin mantle of religion left her bare and cold. In the word "home" on her father's lips there was something that

warmed her. Was it indeed home where she and Marius had lived their lives? Why should she feel a glow and a thrill at the thought of going back to Southampton Row where she had heard laughter in which she could not share, where Nettie and Nettie's lovers played and sung and she sat in that small back room and listened to Sinclair Furley?

Home! was it indeed home to her, that scented house, close and warm, filled with fumes of smoke, and the scent of spirits, where the bells were never silent and the rooms never empty, where Marius had died, and she begun to live? She only knew that she wanted to go away with her father. It was there, not here, was her place, her poor place.

"Get your things on and come away. You've got other things than these, haven't you?" He looked at her uniform with disfavour.

Lucilla looked around her. She had clung to Captain Nelly in her direst extremity; these walls had seen her anguish on the night she realised, although dimly, from what she had been saved. Could she leave them? Could she go back to where her father and Nettie lived together; where there was loose living and light talking, and no God to whom to pray for help? *Where Mordaunt sometimes came?*

Could she abandon salvation?

CHAPTER XXV

AND her heart answered, she could.

Four months ago her young and tender maidenhood, waking to her perils, shrank back afraid, and she had fled. For refuge she had turned to God. She realised now that for her there was no God and Sinclair Furley drove the reason of it home with his loose hammer of lewd suggestion. She was weak, morally, intellectually, physically, a girl that had needed the calm of domesticity and household love in which to rear a soul. In the slow heating-house of family affection she should have been reared. But she was Roly's daughter and her mother's daughter, and for domesticity there was Nettie, and for companionship there was the staff of *Footlights*, the *Guzzler's Gazette*, and for teacher there was Sinclair Furley, the realist, the man whose mental excreta soiled every word that percolated through the laboratory of his diseased imagination.

She went with Roly back to Southampton Row, where Nettie received her with comparative warmth. Certainly without reproaches, and with sufficient kindness.

"We shall have to get you some decent clothes," was what she said. If she eyed her curiously, Lucilla was unaware of what the curiosity implied.

Life in Southampton Row had not altered in her absence. There were still the enervating mornings in bed ; the long afternoons, when the staff came, or Nettie's new lover came, when brandies-and-sodas were drunk, songs tried, and the dusk found them all in noisy intimacy. The evenings were the same, the women sitting or lounging on the sofas, the men beside them. The supper-parties at which they all got drunk, the horseplay and the strange songs and anecdotes showed too, the unchanged dionysiac atmosphere.

But Lucilla was aloof no longer. No longer was song hushed, or anecdote expurgated ; she was one of themselves. Soon she ceased to blush when Ted Smith passed her a suggestive letter, or asked her opinion on a lewd verse. She grew in intimacy with Nettie ; coarseness ceased to jar upon her. After all, it was not the coarseness of the Refuge, nor of the streets ; there was wit in it, innuendo that now she understood.

Sinclair Furley came often to the house. It was understood that they were engaged ; but there was no talk of marriage between them ; he never asked her to name a date, near or distant ; she easily avoided being alone with him.

He read his Salvation Army play to her, and sang the blasphemous songs into which he had altered the earnest lines of the hymns ; he confided his ambitions to her, and they all ran on the same lines. Notoriety, that was his god. His unsavoury reputation gave him no uneasiness, vanity salved every wound. He told the girl stories of women—

women who had offered themselves to him, and whom he had repulsed. She came to loathe his sallowness, his white hands with their yellow nails, his light eyes and loose lips, everything he said ; but he was absorbed in his play and she grew adroit in dodging him.

But she did not hate the other men about the house, nor their attentions to her. Mordaunt Rivers avoided the house these first few weeks of her return home. She was always expecting to see him, listening for the sound of his name. All the talk about her was of love and lovers ; love in its phases of consummation ; she began to look on men and women with eyes no longer pure.

It was a terribly dangerous phase for a girl to be in. She was all alive to love and to be loved and her mind was filled with no other thoughts. If Ted Smith, with his fair beardless face and laughing mouth met her on the stairs and put a loose arm around her, she dreamt of him all night. If Tom Furley, big and blackbearded, took advantage of his future relationship to take an unlicensed kiss in the dusk or gloaming, she was filled with his presence for hours after.

And she grew in beauty. Even Roly was surprised sometimes at her fairness when he saw her in evening dress. And he would look away. Roly never grew fond of Lucilla's company, never heard her laugh with the others without discomfort ; never saw her sitting on a sofa, with some man lounging beside her, without a frown settling on his face.

Lucilla had no virginal fears and flushes with her fiancé. Those long lascivious hours of dreaming never had Sinclair Furley for hero. She never thought about him at all if she could help it; never with liking.

The weeks went by and the Salvation Army incidents faded into the background of her mind. Her engagement to Sinclair seemed as a liaison that would never reach a climax, a somebody like these other women had in husband or lover, from whom to conceal sentiment and action.

The paper flourished. The paper kept them all, all these men and the hospitable open house where champagne was drunk out of soda-water glasses and big Havanas were as plentiful as blackberries. Over the bare shoulders of the actresses they undraped, the staff of *Footlights* climbed to ease and affluence.

And at the office, Mordaunt Rivers wrote and edited, speaking of Lucilla only once, and then to her father.

He did not see Roly for two or three weeks after Lucilla went home and then he met him at the office. It was a necessary business interview about an article, or rather a series of articles too important to start without consultation. Roly took the MS. from him, ran through it silently; equally silently Mordaunt waited.

Then suddenly, abruptly he said: .

"Did you see her?"

Roly looked up from the papers, made a brief remark about the suggested series, threw them on the table, and answered:

"Yes, she is at the Row; she is going to marry Furley."

If it were Furley who had come between them it seemed to him better to ignore it. In fact he was Roly, who wanted to spare everybody's feelings, and, in any case, his own.

Mordaunt read his reticence wrongly, thought there was more behind it, and he avoided Roly's house, and Roly's parties at theatres and music-halls.

So matters might have continued indefinitely, had not accident accomplished what design had frustrated for so long.

It happened this way. The Tessie Gay fever had passed and Roly for the moment was without an infatuation. As usual under such circumstances, he was much at home. Every night there was company to dinner. Ted Smith would come, and not only Lord Lusher, but Lord Sandel, who had shared with Roly the affections of the dethroned Tessie.

It was the occasion of one of these cheery little dinner-parties. Here were Ronald Saunders, the young tenor, Nettie's latest captive; Lord Sandel, with the head of a Roman Emperor and the torso of an English prize-fighter, and Johnnie Targer, a young lady who had been the missing witness in a recent notorious divorce case. There was nothing else noticeable about her; neither her appearance, her talents, nor her intelligence; but she had disappeared and reappeared in a conveniently startling manner. It had been a *cause célèbre* in which her evidence was essential, so she was given a

leading part at a west-end theatre, and walked ungracefully through it, to the gratification of the audience who came to see and not to hear. Roly paragraphed her. Nettie was introduced to the co-respondent whom she assisted, Johnnie Targer now made Southampton Row her headquarters.

Lucilla sat opposite Lord Sandel and presently she noted his eyes looking boldly into hers. She looked down.

"Here's luck," he said, lifting his glass, and then she smiled faintly.

Nothing else passed during that dinner, yet the glance had set Lucy's heart beating. She tried to remember all she had heard about Lord Sandel. He had a wife who neither knew Nettie, nor about Tessie Gay. Lord Sandel was rich, heir to a dukedom and when he had grown tired of Tessie he gave her £10,000; but she had cost him as much more. Lucilla remembered to have heard all this. He had certainly looked at her strangely when he said, "Here's luck." She wondered now if he were really as bad as they said.

"What are we going to do this evening?" asked Roly an hour or two later.

"Let's take the ladies out somewhere," suggested Sandel.

He did not look again at Lucilla.

"There is nothing we haven't seen," Roly objected. "It's too warm for the Troc., and I can't stand those beastly performing dogs at the Pav. Lottie Stephens has got a supper-party; but we can't take them there."

"Sims Reeves is advertised at the Albert Hall," put in Ronald Saunders timidly.

He was very young. Nettie's lovers seemed to grow younger as she grew older. Ronald Saunders was also going to be a great singer, presently, when she had trained him. In the meantime, the boy hung about her, fancied himself in love with her and sang to her accompaniments.

Sandel looked at him under his heavy brows, when he made the proposition. The Albert Hall with this party did not suit him at all.

"Let's go the Aquarium," he said, "and see the tattooed man."

"Oh yes," came in chorus from Nettie and Johnnie Targer.

The men went on smoking and drinking whilst the ladies withdrew to make the necessary changes in their toilettes. Lucilla made herself very smart, with an embroidered bolero over her black dinner dress. She felt excited; she thought it was because she had never been to the Aquarium. The carriage came round—*Footlights* could support a carriage now—and the three ladies went into it. But Sandel objected to them going alone; he said he would accompany them, and Roly and Mr. Saunders could follow in a hansom.

He sat with Lucilla, their backs to the horses. Sometimes the carriage jolted, and once his knees touched hers. But he did not speak to her.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE Aquarium was gloomy, cold, and half-empty. There were a few respectable people, with labour-stained hands, carrying babies, leading younger children; and a few women, gaily dressed, leaning against the pillars, or talking in groups, depressed and quiet.

"It's very early," said Roly apologetically.

All together they went to where there is a platform and seats in front, and music-hall artists alternated on the stage with *poses plastiques* and *tableaux vivants*. The gloom of the place seemed to settle on the party, and the warmth of the little dinner and drink evaporated from them.

They soon grew tired of the *poses plastiques* and the entertainment generally. But before proceeding to the reception of the tattooed gentleman they went to the bar, and endeavoured to supply the lack of external warmth by setting up an inner conflagration. Then they went in and one by one shook hands solemnly with the cold and silky-feeling Prince of Tattooland. After that, somehow or other, his room was full, and that may account for it, the party got separated and Lucilla found Lord Sandel by her side.

It was later now, the groups larger, there were

many more young men, the hall was warmer and more full of life.

"Take my arm," said Sandel. "This ain't exactly a place for little girls." He affected the speech of the people. "I think they went to see the swimming; I heard Roly say something about it. We had better go and look for them."

"Oh yes," she answered, "let us try and find them."

But she was not nervous nor shy with him, if a little excited. His reputation made him interesting, made her pleasantly fearful. They went in to see the swimming with a struggling crowd, consisting chiefly of the women with husbands and babies. They found themselves in a vault-like apartment where Professor Beckwith was giving a demonstration of his art. They took their seats right at the extreme corner, near the top of the room, furthest from the door.

Lucilla watched the swimming; the men, broad and sinuous, cleaving their way through the grimy water with long side strokes, their muscles big and prominent. Then came the women, their long hair streaming as they floated on their backs, the well-directed limelight making them metallically bright against the dark waters. They swam this way and that; with their feet only, and with their hands only; they swam through hoops; and dived one over the other. It amused her, and Sandel watched her. He thought her "devilish pretty" and wondered he had not noticed it before. Her skin was as fair as that of a child, she was grace-

ful, a little shy ; it didn't matter that she wasn't very talkative. Tessie had dined him of exuberant spirits.

For the last feat of all the professor undressed in the water, smoked a cigar, and let off a pistol. As the loud report of the pistol rang through the vault Lucilla started, and her companion grasped her hand, and kept it.

"Were you frightened ? "

"Only for a second."

She tried to withdraw her hand.

"What's the matter with leaving it there ? I say, you and I would get on all right, don't you think ? I'm pretty miserable just now, at a loose end. Can't we be pals ? " He looked at her from under his heavy-lidded eyes.

She dropped hers.

"I like having friends, pals as you call it," she said hesitatingly. He thought he caught a gleam of coquettishness when she looked up. "But we haven't known each other very long."

"I caught your eye at dinner. I knew I liked you then. I only came here to talk to you."

"Did you ? "

"You know I did, you little witch. I don't believe you're half as demure as you pretend." He gave her hand a squeeze.

The performance was over, but Lucy and Lord Sandel were quite the last in getting out ; he still held her hand, his was warm, and thrilled her. Just as they left the swimming the lights went out. As if to protect her from the crush, he released her

hand and put his arm round her waist, making her feel hot and a little nervous.

"It's all right—keep close to me." She had no choice with his arm like that about her.

Outside, the hall was full of people, warm with life and liquor. Men and women were talking, and she could guess of what.

"Where is father? Where are the others do you think?" asked Lucilla tremulously.

"Oh, we shall find them right enough, don't you worry. Would you mind if I had to see you home?"

"It must be very late. Do look. I'm sure father would not have gone without me." She was really nervous now. "Do let us go and look for them."

"Stay here; they must pass us as they go out. You ain't frightened of me, are you? You are only pretending, aren't you?"

Up to now Lucilla had not been frightened. Now, all at once her heart began to beat very quickly. He held her, his hand was hot about her waist, and she remembered the histories she had heard of him. But she did not want to make a scene. She wished he would not look at her like that, stand so near her. All at once it flashed into her mind that people might be thinking they were talking like . . . like the other women and men around them, and then the blushes came, and again she tried to make him move.

"Do find them; let us go to the door."

"There is plenty of time. I say," he tightened his hold, "I want to talk to you. I haven't talked

to you at all yet. What do you think of me? Do you like me at all? I believe you do. . . ."

She did not want to stay there with him, but she did not want to drive him right away from her. She had the feminine pride in conquest, but something stronger than instinct in her made for retreat.

"Eh? why don't you answer? Do you think you could ever get fond of me? I'm getting awfully fond of you."

His gaze was fixed upon her, her head drooped under it.

"I don't know," she answered.

"A fellow like me wants some dear little girl like you to take an interest in him. What a little hand you've got."

She plucked up courage to answer:

"Yours is so big."

"Oh! perhaps it is." Again she tried to pull her hand away. She felt the heat of his and it agitated her. "I can scarcely feel it in mine. I suppose I seem a great ugly fellow to you altogether; you are such a dainty morsel."

"Oh no."

She would not hurt his feelings for the world, or anybody's feelings for the matter of that; so she raised her eyes to his and said:

"I don't think you are ugly. Nettie says, people say . . . that you are quite handsome." She was confused, she could have talked to him better if he let go her hand.

"I'd like you to think me handsome," he said.

"I don't care what anybody else thinks. Look at me."

His hair grew low on his forehead, his head well set on his thick neck, he was heavy about the jaw, but his figure, carriage, swaying movement from the hips gave him physical attraction.

She tried to look at him as he bade her, but what she met in his eyes lowered hers quickly.

"Who gave you that coat?"

"Father."

"He ought to have given you a nice little brooch to fasten it with, a little bar of diamonds. Do you like diamonds?"

"I like pearls better," she answered innocently. It made him laugh and say that women were all alike, in high good humour. He did not want to find this pretty girl any different from the others. He wanted things to be easy for him.

"I daresay it might run to pearls."

What else he said she never remembered. She liked his obvious admiration, was glad he admired her, grew nervous, and did not know if she wanted to find the others, or if she did not. It was exciting and she knew she would enjoy it more in retrospect. She had often thought she would like some one to make passionate love to her, to have adventures such as Nettie and the others related. But when Lord Sandel held her hand she wished for nothing more definitely than that he would let it go.

It was very late. Lord Sandel, as he stood there talking, knew that Roly and the others had gone home, but he kept his knowledge to himself.

Noblesse oblige, but the greatest obligation *noblesse* was under was to *itself*. The girl was really a "topper." He had tired of Tessie's coarseness, Tessie was never satisfied unless the public eye was on her, she was "too damned vulgar." Now here was quite a different sort of girl, soft and gentle, not too difficult. Sandel never took too much trouble over this sort of thing.

They stood and talked about becoming pals, and friendship generally, and what fun they might have together. . . . Lord Sandel talked, Lucilla only listened, watching all the time for Nettie or her father, or any of their party to pass. Then suddenly, unexpectedly, she saw someone, arm in arm with Ted Smith. And at the sight the colour forsook her cheeks and Lord Sandel's words fell on deaf ears, his hand on her arm was as if it had melted away. She was no longer even conscious of his existence.

"Mordaunt!" faltered from her unguarded lips. He heard it; stopped abruptly, turned and saw her standing there with Lord Sandel. He hesitated for an imperceptible fraction of a second, then pulled himself together. To meet her again, sauntering in the Aquarium at midnight with Lord Sandel made sentiment absurd.

"Oh! it's you; well, and how do you find yourself?" he said as coolly as if they had shaken hands and parted but yesterday. He acted quite well. The tone, the manner, were completely indifferent. But she could not play up to him. A lovely flush overwhelmed her; her head drooped, and he could see that his name had escaped from her involun-

tarily, that she was so moved by this meeting that she had not a word for him.

Mordaunt was more affected by her embarrassment than he had thought possible. He could find nothing more to say to her. Lord Sandel spoke to Ted, and asked him if he had seen Roly anywhere about.

"They've gone home. I saw them about an hour ago; they went to hear Martinetti at the Royal; some of the boys are there and we are all to sup at the Row *en route* for Lottie Stephens's party. We can go together now, if you are ready?"

Ted glanced at Lucilla; he rather admired Lucilla, but Ted's facile affections never soared higher than a barmaid. Still, he didn't quite see leaving the girl behind with Sandel.

"Yes, yes," said Lucilla quickly. "We can all go together."

She showed a very decided inclination to get away from him and Lord Sandel yielded gracefully.

"A very good idea; will you see if you can get a cab?" he asked Ted.

"I can't come," said Mordaunt shortly. "I've got an engagement."

"Rot! you're going on to Lottie's, you told me so; you can't have an engagement between then and now."

Lucilla did not speak, did not ask him to come to the house. Yet when Ted pressed him he hesitated. Why had he stayed away? Why should he not go on there, convince himself he had no further interest in the girl? Furley first, and now Sandel;

what interest *could* he have in her? And Nettie? what had Nettie done or said to keep him from her so long? Roly would be pleased to see him, Roly was always hospitable . . . But he had already hesitated too long.

"A four-wheeler is beastly; I've got two hansoms. Jump in," Ted said to Lucilla. She did as she was told obediently.

Who would follow her into the cab? Lord Sandel? Ted prevented that with a certain malice. He had had a light staircase flirtation with Lucilla and Sandel looked so jolly cocksure.

"You go on with Miss Lewesham, Mordaunt. Sandel and I will follow in no time." He stood aside.

It was impossible for Mordaunt to refuse.

CHAPTER XXVII

THEY drove in silence at first. Mordaunt intended to be very cool and calm. The girl was nothing to him now.

"Will you have the window shut?" he asked politely. "The wind is in the east."

She shivered slightly.

"Is it?" Her voice was so low he could scarcely hear her.

"Was there a good entertainment on? I came in late," he asked.

How often they had been in a cab like this together! It was impossible not to remember. Was she remembering, he wondered.

He wanted to hear her speak, to hear how far she had travelled since that summer day on the river. Why did she not speak? She was going to marry Sinclair Furley. He had seen her leaning against the pillar at the Aquarium, Lord Sandel's hand on her arm.

"You're not cold?" he said again.

But she did not answer.

Then he looked down at her and something of the old tenderness swept reluctantly over him; she had never had a chance. She had grown extraordinarily lovely, she was shrinking in the corner of the cab,

away from him ; her face averted. Moved by an uncontrollable impulse, he put a sudden hand upon her knee. She looked at him as if he had struck her, her eyes dilated, her cheeks paled ; she burst into tears. He took his hand away again awkwardly ; feeling a brute.

The loose window rattled, the wind came in under it and the skeleton of a cab-horse, under the lash, made spasmodic efforts to increase his speed. Neither of them spoke.

They reached Southampton Row and he assisted her to alight. To both of them the drive had seemed short. When they stood together on the doorstep, quite involuntarily, he said :

" It seems like yesterday, doesn't it ? " He went on as if they had never parted :

" You'd better run up to your room before supper ; try and look as if nothing had happened."

When she had obeyed him, he could not believe it was he who had said the words. They had no meaning. Nothing *had* happened !

The room was full when he entered. The party had been reinforced at the Aquarium and there seemed to be no longer any talk of going to Lottie Stephens's party. As, indeed, why should they ? For every ingredient that could go to make Lottie Stephens's party pleasant was theirs without the trouble of moving. Here was food and drink and smoke ; Jenny Farrell, Johnnie Targer, Lady Lusher, everybody.

Nettie greeted Mordaunt as if they had met but yesterday. She gave him her finger-tips,

signified to him that the cigarette-box was in its old position, and then went on with her conversation with Mr. Saunders.

But Roly was more enthusiastic, leaving all his other guests to make this one welcome.

"I am glad to see you; I am awfully glad to see you. What will you have? Nettie, you have said 'How de do to Mordie,' haven't you?" I am damned glad you came on. Supper will be ready in a minute. There are the cigarettes. Shall I mix you a whisky?"

And Mordaunt Rivers stood up against the mantelpiece, talking to Roly, smoking his cigarette, the whisky and soda within his reach, thinking that in all the long months since he stood there last nothing had altered. There were the same faces, the same empty laughter, red lips and gleaming teeth, jests and gestures. Tom still smoked quickly to get through as many cigars, whilst he was smoking for nothing, as time would allow. Ted Smith still played his practical jokes; now he was elaborately preparing a chair with pins, ready for Charlie when he should sit down. Lord Lusher was talking 'racing notes' with Mrs. Montini, already a little muddled and didactic. The same butler moved about with glasses, matches, cigarettes, called now here and now there. The room was unchanged in its draperies and broken bric-à-brac, photographs of undraped actresses, pampas grass and bulrushes dropping to pieces in their dirt and decay.

Nothing was changed, save that Nettie, instead of having Antonelli sprawling with his ungainly

length beside her on the sofa, sat on the piano stool and talked softly to Ronald Saunders.

Nothing was changed, save that Charlie had been rechristened "Jack the Ripper" since he had taken to do the Art criticisms for the paper and that Lucilla, when she came downstairs again, having obviously bathed her eyes and resumed her normal expression, seemed now at home with the others. Jenny Farrell offered her powder puff affectionately, and said she wasn't looking up to form. Lady Lusher handed her cigarette-case and capped Jenny's remark with :

"You got lost with Sandel, didn't you?" and drawled sympathetically : "I've heard he's awfully fatiguing."

Sandel, already here with Ted, laughed and answered :

"I didn't get half a chance."

As the evening wore on, after supper, champagne, and some licence, the company showed a tendency to divide into couples. Nettie and Mr. Saunders were in the drawing-room, the red shaded lamp on the piano not shedding light enough to show the lines in her face. The young tenor was moved by her ; Mordaunt could see his hands tremble, and sudden flushes on his beardless cheek, as Nettie played the game she knew so well.

Then Mordaunt's eyes sought Lucilla. He did not know that the rose in her cheeks that came and went was not habitual. He failed to divine that she was as one in a dream and of all those in the room she was conscious only of his presence.

He knew nothing of this. He saw her after supper beyond the portière in the small end room, alone. He would have joined her, was irresolute, made a step forward—Lord Sandel was before him! He saw him pull the portière to. Mordaunt could see no more. Now this room in which he stood seemed foetid and close, the laughter of the women and the men's voices jarred on his nerves. He could not stand it, he could not stay, his hand was already on the door, his "good night" to Roly on his lips, when there was the sound of a scuffle, a stifled cry, and Lucilla, very white, her eyes dilated, was in the room again. Time stood still, receded, for it was to his side she came quickly, as to a refuge.

Her white lips were tremulous, her eyes all shocked and wet.

Careless Roly noticed nothing.

"Run away, there's a good girl! I want to talk shop with Mordaunt!"

Lucilla did not move. What prompted the man whose heart was really tender, overflowing, running like water to her, he could never tell, but he answered the appeal in her eyes by saying:

"Please don't go. Your father and I can talk shop to-morrow. I've never had an opportunity of congratulating you on your engagement to Mr. Furley."

He did not face her when he had said it. He had the grace to turn away, to pretend he missed his cigarette holder. When he turned again she had gone. . . .

He talked on, but scarcely knew of what.

"Anything the matter? Have a glass of Scotch neat? You've turned pale."

"I'm all right."

"Well, don't go yet, don't break us up."

He sat down again, Roly went on talking, minutes passed, half an hour passed, an hour passed.

Then he got up.

"Good-night, Roly," he said abruptly; "good-night. I can't keep the hours I did when I was young, I must be off."

"Good-night then, old man, if you must go. Now you've broken the ice, come often."

Mordaunt did not disturb the party by formal adieux. Roly went out into the hall with him. Sandel was there speaking to the butler. He made a pretence of looking for his coat and hat when he saw them, but Mordaunt saw he slipped something into John's hand, saw, or thought he saw, a glance of intelligence pass between them.

Mordaunt went away, Lord Sandel a moment in advance of him. When the door closed behind Mordaunt, Lord Sandel's hansom was already out of sight. He walked a few paces, then paused irresolutely. . . . High up in the room that was Lucilla's he saw a light, dim white, behind the blind. The dim light behind the blind! What was going on there, of what was she thinking? Had Sandel sent her a letter? Was she reading Sandel's letter?

The man had frightened her and it was to him she came for protection, not to her father. Her father had said, "Run away, I want to talk to

Mordaunt." And Mordaunt, he . . . had flung Furley's name at her !.

Ten minutes or so he walked away irresolutely, then he went back to the house. The door was open, John airing himself on the step.

"John," he said quickly, in a manner unlike his own, "I want to speak to Miss Lucy, I want five minutes with her ; go up and tell her so. I'll wait outside. Tell her I must speak to her. Go straight up."

Imperturbably John the butler answers :

"Miss Lucy has gone out ; she went out a minute or two after you left."

Mordaunt's teeth went through his underlip, and he never felt the hurt. He turned away without another word.

Too late, too late ! Sandel had importuned her, and she had gone to him ; to that brute who had tired of Tessie, flung her money, thrown her over. . . .

Russell Square was empty, deserted and chill, the moon on the pavement might have been snow, it was so white and cold. She had gone to Lord Sandel, she, little Lucy, who had fled from him not so long ago, who would have come back to him that very evening, if he had but said the word. Lucy, of whom since she had left him he knew nothing, but knew nevertheless that she had looked to him that night for help ; for help, and he had flung Furley's name at her !

There surged over this man a very passion of regret, he cursed himself for his forbearance, he cursed himself for his want of it. The girl cared

for him, her eyes said it, appealed to him. How had he answered the appeal? Nothing had been explained, he knew nothing of what had passed from the time she fled from Cecil Street to the time Rolfe had found her in the Salvation Army. But he could have sworn to her innocence, to her purity. His heart was hot and sick within him as he pictured her with Sandel. Twice to-night her eyes had pleaded with him. Twice he had turned away. Now it was too late.

All the way home her eyes pleaded to him; wet as he had seen them when she got out of the hansom, shocked and strained as when she had come out of that room to his side. He could not rid himself of them in the quiet streets, nor in the noisy club into which he turned to escape their appeal.

He stood for a few moments at the bar, the click of the billiard-balls, the betting men, and sporting men, could not efface for a moment the eyes that haunted him.

Again he felt the life he led and that they all led was horrible. To have been able to think of her in one of those Bayswater drawing-rooms, whose dull respectability he had spent his journalistic life in deriding, would have been happiness to him.

And so thinking he reached at length his rooms in Cecil Street, turned the key in the latch, walked up the narrow dingy stairs, put his hand to the door, and received his first faint surprise on seeing there was a light in the room. He turned the handle, and stopped dead.

Yes, his eyes had not played him false, though he put his hand up to them, as if to shade them from too bright a light.

She stood there, very white. There was nothing of the child left about her.

"Good God!"

"You are shocked?"

"I'm . . . I'm bewildered," he even smiled, "bemused. I waited to see you, went back."

She faltered then and her lips trembled pitifully. But she got out:

"I couldn't answer you before them all. About. . . ."

"About Sinclair Fulley! Don't answer me." He spoke quickly, made a step toward her. "Answer me nothing, tell me nothing." Now he had her in his arms and was looking into her eyes. "Tell me nothing except that it is true you have come back to me."

Never was a lover more gentle than he as he soothed the agony of self-abasement that sobbed itself out in his arms.

"I didn't understand. I didn't know. . . ."

"You didn't know that you loved me, what love was, is. Sweetheart, don't fear, you don't fear me now, you only love me. Yield me your lips."

It was some time after when she said:

"Can you ever forgive me? Can you ever forgive me?"

He whispered to her:

"After this, after this, that you have come back to me, what have I to forgive? You'll not leave

me again, promise me that. I'll néver let you regret it, may God forgive me if ever I let you regret it. My brave little girl! I will be so gentle with you, so good to you. . . ."

"Did you really want me? Was I really right to come? Only say you'll never think badly of me for coming. There is only you in all the world . . . do what you will with me. . . ."

CHAPTER XXVIII

HE was her lover, not her judge. Who shall be her judge? Had she ever a chance of leading a cleanly or an honourable life? Ought instinct untrained by education to have been sufficient to keep her pure in such surroundings? Perhaps. But as she never had but one lover, never gave her lips to any man but this, sacrificed everything to him and in the end her life, Pity may find for her the absolution Morality denies.

It was of course a terrible thing she did. The man she loved accused her of infidelity and she carried her chastity to him to disprove the accusation.

The streets, empty and cold, smote her from the purpose that grew more terrible as it grew nearer. The servant who showed her his room smote her with coarse laughter that was like a scourge laid brutally on bare quivering flesh. She had to wait for him and she waited with heart sinking and fear, and hopes more sickening than fear, so full of shame they were. It was the birth of her womanhood, she bit back the cry of the travail from which it was born. In her agony of humiliation as she waited she hid her face in her hands, moaned and sobbed; crouched down in the corner of the sofa and heard

nothing but her own shameful breath. She never forgot it ; it is not such things as these that women forget. Minutes seemed hours until he came, then she would have put time back for ever.

He played the man, spoke words to her that she drank in as one who dies of thirst, drove fear and shame away with kisses, with protecting arms held close around her, with whispers. But what he drove away came back ; it could never be otherwise.

One is, notwithstanding everything, glad to be able to chronicle a short time of happiness, a brief few weeks.

He took rooms for her at Twickenham ; the woman who kept Lucilla from wifhood kept him poor, but he did the best he could. They looked out on green, they could almost hear the lapping of the river, it was so near. This was the first home Lucilla had ever known. Mordaunt would sit and write in that small front room, and she would watch, she never liked to be far from him. She would sit in a chair so close beside him that she could touch his coat-sleeve now and then to assure herself that she was not dreaming but with him, never more to be parted. When they walked out she would hold his arm, keeping close to his side.

They led in these few weeks a life isolated from the world. Mordaunt would write in the mornings, Lucilla beside him ; in the afternoons, strolling down to the river, they would embark on a small boat and idly float down stream, all the green

around them framing peace and happy love. They neither spoke of the future nor of the past. Mordaunt did not doubt his capacity to care for her always. She neither read, wrote, worked, nor thought; but that made no difference to him. He had never imagined her clever or capable, or anything but what he found her, loveable, dependent, sweet.

She wept and clung to him when he had to go to London on business, and entreated him not to go. He had always to argue with her about it.

"Be reasonable, my darling! I must go. We have to live, and if I don't work we can't live. I shall only be gone a few hours. Come down to the station to meet me, that will shorten the time. Sweetheart, don't cry so! You break my heart. Another kiss. No, not that way; raise your head, so that I can see you are not crying any more. Give me your lips." He left his kisses on her lips to keep her company in his absence.

She had no occupation, she had learned no woman's work to keep fingers busy and thoughts clean. She sat idle until his return, full of his last kiss or his next, murmuring his name, slipping down from her seat to rest her head against the place where his had rested.

That was how Sinclair Furley found her. He had taken a great deal of trouble to trace her, for Roly would give him no information, said he had none to give. And in a measure that was true. Mordaunt supplied his copy, came to the office, and did his work regularly. Roly asked no questions,

and Mordaunt volunteered no information ; but the men seemed drawn more closely together in an invisible bond of sympathy.

Sinclair Furley found out where she was, no matter how, and now he stood before her in the room made sacred to her by her lover.

She saw him, hid her face.

"Why have you come here? Go away! I don't want to speak to you."

He was delighted to see that she shrank from him.

"You don't mean it?" he said.

"Go away!"

His presence was hateful to her. She wanted to forget everything but that she was Mordaunt Rivers's wife. He said she was really his wife, he had never had any other real wife. There were times when he taught her to whisper the word "husband" in his ear.

"I shall not go away; it is absurd of you to talk like that. You are engaged to me; I have never released you. You have promised to marry me. This," he waved his pale hand deprecatingly, "is merely an episode, an experience, interesting, but not vital. Mordaunt Rivers is not even an artist."

She averted her face from him. She hated everything he said, but did not know how to answer it. She had thought no more of sin or shame since she had been with Mordaunt, but only of love; now, every word brought back the old horror. But he talked on, he would not go.

"I shall come every day while he is away. You must know, now you have begun this kind of life,

that it is quite usual in your situation to receive visitors. . You never heard the end of my play. And I have written a little poem. You must not be shy with me, I am not really angry. Mordaunt stole a march on me. Ha! ha! but I'll get even with him." And with that he put his hand on her shoulder.

She sprang to her feet, with white face and wild eyes.

"How dare you? how dare you?" she gasped out, and then began to cry, a little wildly, hiding her face in her hands.

"Oh now; really now," he began, "you allow Mordaunt more privileges than that." He enjoyed her tears, and attempted another caress. She could not defend herself, although she put out both hands, her weak hands. His face seemed very near, and his breath. She felt stifled with it, she tried to call out, she did call out, fighting him off with her weak hands. Now she lost sight of him, now he was so near her that she could not shriek; but she did shriek, more than once.

The shrieks rang in his ears for months. He was never as near her as she thought, he saw the change in her face too soon; saw her distorted face and the foam in the corners of the mouth. He ran away as quickly as possible; did not even stay to call the landlady to her aid.

Poor Lucilla!

She recovered from her seizure before Mordaunt returned from London, was able to find her way into their bedroom, gaze into her looking-glass, recognise,

and remember! She had lived beside Marius for ten terrible years . . . her own lips were bitten, her eyes strained and bloodshot.

And she knew this was not her first epileptic seizure. Memory took her back to the night when Nettie had turned her from the house, to the illness that had come upon her in the Refuge.

She looked again in the glass, saw her blood-shot eyes stare wildly back, her bitten lips, with the dried blood on them. This was Mordaunt's "darling little wife," the "only wife he had ever known." She saw her reason threatened, saw herself becoming more and more like Marius. But it was of Mordaunt she thought, only of Mordaunt. Sinclair Furley would come to her again and terror of him would make her like this. Other men might come, Mordaunt could not always be with her. Would he want to be if he saw her like this? Oh God! if he saw her like this!

She shut out her eyes with her hands and saw her lover, Mordaunt, in whose love she lived, shrinking back from her with horror, dreading as she had dreaded those shrieks, writhings; her hopeless, helpless, dreadful self. She knew all about epilepsy, memory left out nothing of what she had seen Marius endure. She had dreamed of Marius, known nightmare, dreaded him, living side by side with him. That would be Mordaunt's fate with her, Mordaunt's, her lover-husband; in whose arms she now slept safely through each happy night. One day, one night she would begin to writhe and gibber, scream; memory spared her

nothing. How often as an unhappy and terrified child had she awakened to listen, or to cower under the bed-clothes!

Now her bloodshot eyes saw red. In the sea of red she saw her barque of Reason foundered. Mordaunt must not bear such a burden. She must save him from that. "Greater love hath no man than this". . . but for a woman it is nothing to die for her love.

She had to take her courage in both hands, her poor failing courage. An hour and he would be here. How the thought weakened her. Fortunately—but was it fortunately?—that foundering barque of her reason gave another heave. She saw Sinclair Furley, heard his fatuous, "I'll come every day"; she heard the rattle of the door-handle; it was but the wind, but she heard Sinclair Furley. The window was open, the window: her cry, her fall were simultaneous.

She laid down her life for her lover, and twelve of her countrymen pronounced her requiem. "Suicide whilst of unsound mind." They censured Mordaunt! If he returned the compliment, ironically or sadly, it left their appetites unimpaired and their self-confidence unshaken. "Suicide whilst of unsound mind." No other verdict was possible.

For all that others sinned, Lucilla suffered. But the last suffering of all she was spared. She never saw the love-light die out of his eyes, nor his bonds gall him. She was always a sweet and tender

memory to him, altering all his life. But that, as Kipling would say, is another story. It will be written one day, the story of Mordaunt Rivers's life when his wife was dead, and Lucilla was dead, and fresh impulse and impetus came to him to shake himself free from the past.

Lucilla Lewesham lies in the churchyard of Twickenham parish church. The marble cross he put up bears the simplest inscription. It may be true of her, it is certainly true of him ;

" Out of the wreck I rise."

TO

THE DEAR MEMORY

OF

LUCILLA

Telephone—

6659 GERRARD

31 ESSEX STREET

LONDON, ENGLAND

Telegraphic Address—

“GUCIEN, LONDON”

October, 1912

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SIR WILLIAM MAGNAY

Author of "The Fruits of Indiscretion," "The Long Hand," etc.

This is a strong story full of exciting incidents. The hero is a farmer crippled for want of capital, which he finds quite unexpectedly. A thunderstorm and an irate husband cause a young banker to seek refuge at the farm, from which a loud knocking causes further retreat to a big family tomb, which becomes his own when the lightning brings some old ruins down and buries both. The banker's bag of gold falls into the hands of the farmer, who profits by its use. Other characters play important parts, and love interest adds its softening charm.

Cheerful Craft.

R. ANDOM

Author of "We Three and Taddles," "Neighbours of Mine."
With 60 original illustrations.

There is nothing sombre or introspective about "Cheerful Craft," and those who agree with Mr. Balfour's view of the need of lighter and brighter books will find here something to please them. Broad humour and rollicking adventure characterise this story. A city clerk rises from obscurity and attains to a position of wealth and dignity, and carries us with him all the way, condoning his rascality for the sake of his ready humour and cheery optimism. After all he is a merry rogue, and he works no great harm to anyone, and much good to himself, and incidentally to most of those with whom he comes in contact. We hardly know in which form to like him most, a Hilary Ford, ex-clerk, lounge and tramp, or Havelock Rose, the son of a wealthy ship-owner, whose place he usurps under circumstances which do credit to the writer's ingenuity without putting too great a strain on the credulity of the reader.

Love's Cross Roads.

L. T. MEADE

Author of "Desborough's Wife," "Ruffles," etc.

This is the story of a good and honourable man who, in a moment of sudden temptation fell. How his sin found him out—what he suffered from remorse; how, with all his stivings, he was nearly circumvented, and how, just when he thought all would be well, he nearly lost what was far above gold to him is ably described. The story is highly exciting, and from the first page to the last it would be difficult to put the book down. The account of the villain who sought to ruin Paul Colthurst, and to cause the death of either young Peter or Pamala, is full of terrible interest. But perhaps the most truly life-like character in the whole book is Silas Luke, the poor, miserable tramp, who though bribed, tempted, tortured, yet could not bring himself to do the evil thing suggested, and who was saved by the sweet girl who was meant to be his victim. The repentance of the tramp leads to the greater repentance of Paul Colthurst. The story ends happily.

The Swelling of Jordan.

CORALIE STANTON AND

HEATH HOSKIN. Authors of "Plumage," "The Muzzled Ox," etc.

Canon Oriel, an earnest worker in the East End, loved and respected, had years before the story commences, while climbing with his friend Digby Cavan in Switzerland, found in the pocket of his friend's coat, which he had accidentally put on instead of his own, evidence that his friend had robbed his, the canon's, brother and been the cause of his or committing suicide. Oriel, in a struggle which took place between the two men, hurled his friend from the precipice. Now the glacier gives up Cavan's rucksack, and any day it may yield up his body. To reveal subsequent developments would spoil the reader's enjoyment of a thrilling plot.

Opal of October.

JOY SHIRLEY

For those born in the month of October, the opal is said to be a lucky stone, and this novel is based upon the assumption that it is so. It is a story of the times of the soothsayers and the witches, when people were all more or less trying to discover the philosopher's stone which turns everything to gold. The witch in this case is a young girl of great beauty, who narrowly escapes the stake.

Galbraith of Wynyates.

E. EVERETT-GREEN

Author of "Duckworth's Diamonds," "Clive Lofimer's Marriage," etc., etc.

This is a story of the ill consequence following upon the making of an unwise will. Joyce is the only daughter of the real owner of Wynyates who has let the property to a relative who is the next-of-kin after his daughter. Warned of the uncertainty of his own life he wills the property to his daughter in trust during her minority, and appoints the relative who holds the property as tenant, trustee. Overhearing a conversation between the family lawyer and her uncle, who discuss the unwisdom of placing her in the charge of one who is directly interested in her death, she imagines all kinds of evil intentions on the part of her guardian, and looks with suspicion upon all his counsels for her welfare. Love interests lead to complications, but the unfaithfulness of her lover leaves her free and she finally marries the guardian of whom she had stood so long in fear. It is a very readable book written in the author's best style.

The Ban.

LESTER LURGAN

Author of "The Mill-owner," "Bohemian Blood," etc., etc.

This is a story of mystery involving the Ban of Blood. Brenda is a pretty, charming, and very feminine girl of good English family who marries one who adores her, but who has, unknown to himself, Red-Indian blood in his veins. This is revealed to him by an old nurse on her death-bed, and is demonstrated on his return to his wife by the birth of a son who bears unmistakable signs of the terrible inheritance. An old mystery is explained, and new tragedies follow. The child is placed under the care of the grandmother's tribe but soon succumbs, nor does the father long survive the awful experience. After his death Brenda marries her childhood's playmate and first love.

Bright Shame.

KEIGHLEY SNOWDEN

Author of "The Free Marriage," "The Plunder Pit," "Hate of Evil," etc., etc.

Stephen Gaunt, an English sculptor famous in Italy, is the father of a son born out of wedlock, whom he has never heard of. In his youth, a light attachment broken in a causeless fit of jealousy drove him abroad, but when the story opens he is a strong and engaging personality. He comes home to execute a commission, and meets his son without knowing him. In doing so, he encounters a couple, childless themselves, who have passed the boy off as their own since infancy, when his mother died. They are an elder half-brother, who has always hated Stephen, and his sensitive, tender and simple wife, who loves the boy with all her heart, fears to lose him, and who is yet tormented by her secret. A romantic friendship springs up between son and mother; and the chain of accidents and proofs by which he learns the truth, his struggle for control of the boy, who has genius, and the effect of these events on the boy and his foster mother make a fascinating plot.

A Star of the East: A Story of Delhi. CHARLES

E. PEARCE. Author of "The Amazing Duchess," "The Beloved Princess," "Love Besieged," "Red Revenge," etc.

"East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." This is the theme of Mr. Pearce's new novel of life in India. The scene is laid in Delhi, the city of all others where for the past hundred years the traditions of ancient dynasties and the barbaric splendours of the past have been slowly retreating before the ever-advancing influence of the West. The conflict of passions between Nara, the dancing girl, in whose veins runs the blood of Shah Jehan, the most famous of the Kings of Delhi, and Clare Stanhope, born and bred in English conventionality, never so pronounced as in the Fifties, is typical of the differences between the East and the West. The rivalry of love threads its way through a series of exciting incidents, culminating in the massacre and the memorable siege of Delhi. This book completes the trilogy of Mr. Pearce's novels of the Indian Mutiny, of which "Love Besieged" and "Red Revenge" were the first and second.

The Destiny of Claude.

MAY WYNNE

Author of, "Henri of Navarre," "The Red Fleur de Lys," "Honour's Fetters," etc.

Claude de Marbaille to escape a convent life joins her friend Margot de Ladrennes in Touraine. Jacques Comte de Ladrennes, a hunchback, falls in love with her, and when the two girls go to Paris to enter the suite of the fifteen year old Mary Queen of Scots, he follows and takes service with the Duke of Guise. Claude, however, falls in love with Archie Cameron, an officer of the Scottish Guard, who by accident discovers how Queen Mary has been tricked by her Uncles of Guise into signing papers bequeathing Scotland to France in the event of her dying childless. Cameron is imprisoned, but escapes in time to warn the Scots Commissioners on their way home of this act of treachery. Cameron is followed by a spy of the Guises, and the four Commissioners die by poison. Cameron recovers, and returns to Paris to find that Claude has been sent to some unknown Convent. The rest of the tale relates Cameron's search for his sweetheart, the self-sacrifice of the Comte de Ladrennes, and the repentance and atonement of Margot de Ladrennes, who through jealousy betrays her friend.

Susan and the Duke.

KATE HORN

Author of "Edward and I and Mrs Honeybun," "The White Owl," "The Lovelocks of Diana," etc.

Lord Christopher Fitzarden, younger brother of the Duke of Cheadle, is the most delightful of young men. He adopts the old family servants destined for the almshouses by the cynical Duke, who bestows upon him the family house in Mayfair. Fanny, his old nurse, keeps him in order. Susan Ringsford, the heroine, is an early visitor. She is in love with Kit, but he falls madly in love with Rosalind Pilkington, the heiress of a rich manufacturer. The contrast between the two girls is strongly drawn. Susan, sweet and refined—a strong character but of insignificant appearance, and Rosalind radiantly beautiful—ambitious and coarse of nature. The whole party go caravanning with Lady Barchester and an affected little poet, and many love scenes are woven into the tour in the New Forest. Susan and the Duke of Cheadle have a conversation—the Duke loves her in silence, and sees that she loves his brother. He gets up a flirtation with Rosalind, who, anxious to be a duchess, throws over Kit immediately. The Duke disillusions her. Meanwhile Susan and Kit have come together, and the book ends with wedding bells.

Lonesome Land.

B. M. BOWER

A strong, human story in which Valeria Peyson, an Eastern girl, goes out to a desolate Montana town to marry the lover who has preceded her three years before. Unfortunately the lover has not had the moral fibre to stand the unconventionality of Western life, and has greatly deteriorated. However, they marry and live on his ranch, where Valeria finds that the country and her husband are by no means what she thought them. She does her best to make the life endurable and is aided by the kindness of her husband's closest friend, a rough diamond with an honest heart. Out of this situation is unfolded a strong tale of character development and overwhelming love that finds a dramatic outcome in happiness for those most deserving it.

Confessions of Perpetua.

ALICE M. DIEHL

Author of "A Mysterious Lover," "The Marriage of Lenore," etc.

Perpetua is the youngest of three daughters of a baronet, all of whom make wealthy marriages, a duke, a viscount and a colonel sharing the baronet's family. The story opens when Perpetua emerges from the care of her governess and enters society under the auspices of the duchess. She marries against the warnings of the countess and divorces the colonel within three months of their union, and yet all proceeds in a perfectly natural and straightforward manner. The process of disillusion from love's enchantment is well described, and other Perpetuas may well learn a lesson from the heroine's experience. The characters are well drawn and distinct, and the narrative develops dramatic incidents from time to time.

A Modern Ahab.

THEODORA WILSON WILSON

Author of "Bess of Hardendale," "Moll o' the Toll-Bar," etc.

This is a very readable novel in the author's best manner. Rachael Despensier, a successful artist, spends a summer holiday in a Westmoreland village, living at an old farm-house, and making friends of the people. Grimstone, a local baronet, is grabbing the land to make a deer run, and Rachael comes into collision with him, but is adored by his delicate little son. Right-of-way troubles ensue, and violence disturbs the peace. Grimstone's elder son and heir returns from Canada, where he has imbibed Radical notions. He sympathises with the villagers, and is attracted towards Rachael, whom he marries. The baronet determines to oust the farmer whom Rachael had championed, when the tragic death of his delicate little son leads him to relinquish the management of the estate to his heir.

The Annals of Augustine

RAFAEL SABATINI

Author of "Bardelys the Magnificent," "The Lion's Skin," etc.

Mr. Sabatini lays before his readers in "The Annals of Augustine" a startling and poignant human document of the Italian Renaissance. It is the autobiographical memoir of Augustine, Lord of Mondolfo, one of the lesser tyrants of Emilia, a man pre-natally vowed to the cloister by his over-devout mother. With merciless self-analysis does Augustine in these memoirs reveal his distaste for the life to which he was foredoomed, and his early efforts to break away from the repellant path along which he is being forced. The Lord of Mondolfo's times are the times of the Farnese Pope (Paul III.), whose terrible son, Pier Luigi Farnese, first Duke of Parma, lives again, sinister and ruthless, in these pages. As a mirror of the Cinquecento, "The Annals of Augustine" deserves to take an important place, whilst for swiftness of action and intensity of romantic interest it stands alone.

Dagobert's Children.

L. J. BEESTON

"Mr. Beeston's spirited work is already well known to a large circle of readers, but this book is the most powerful he has yet written, and for plot, dramatic incident, and intensity of emotion reaches a very high level. The successive chapters are alive with all the heat and passion of war, and are written with a vividness and power which holds the reader's interest to the last word."

The Redeemer.

RENÉ BAZIN

Author of "The Children of Alsace," "The Nun," "Redemption," etc.

This is a romance of village life in the Loire country, with love complications which awaken sympathy and absorb interest. Davidée is a junior mistress in the village school, and the story mainly concerns her love attraction and moral restraint. She is drawn towards Maievel Jacquet, a worker in the slate quarries near by, with whom Phrosine, a beautiful young woman who has left her husband, is living. Davidée befriends them, but on the death of their child Maievel goes away, and Phrosine, who dislikes Davidée because of her superior morality, goes in search of her son by her husband. Both return to the village, and Phrosine seeks reunion with Maievel, who refuses her, telling her that their dead son bars the way. Phrosine attributes this to the interposition of Davidée, and ultimately leaves with another lover. There is now no longer any barrier between Maievel and Davidée, who can hence follow her attraction without violating her scruples.

The She-Wolf.

MAXIME FORMONT

Author of "A Child of Chance," etc. Translated from the French by Elsie F. Buckley.

This is a powerful novel of the life and times of Cæsar Borgia, in which history and romance are mingled with a strong hand. The author holds Cæsar guilty of the murder of his brother, and shows a strong motive for the crime. The story of the abduction of Alva Colonna on the eve of her marriage with Prospero Sarelli, when she is carried off to his palace at Rome and becomes his slave-mistress, is related. The subsequent events, more or less following history or tradition, include the introduction of the dark woman of gipsy extraction, who enamours Cæsar, and poisons the wine by which the Colonna and her old lover Sarelli die. Cæsar is shown strong, brutal, unscrupulous and triumphant. The story closes with a description of his last days and death. This novel has been highly popular in France.

Her Majesty the Flapper.

A. E. JAMES

With a picture wrapper of "Her Majesty" in colours.

There is a fresh, natural touch about these episodes in the development of a Flapper which make them breezy and refreshing reading, involving no little amusement. Her Majesty the Flapper is a lady-flapper, of course, neither a boulder nor a cad, but just a flapper. Accessories, willing or unwilling, are her cousins Victoria and Bobbie, a male person over thirty, who tells most of the story, though the Flapper is as fireproof as in the telling of the story as in acting it. Of course, Bobbie is victimised, and the story ends with the coming out of the Flapper, and the final victimisation takes the form of an engagement. Readers will sympathise with Bobbie, and some will envy him.

Chaff and the Wind.

G. VILLIERS STUART

Chaff and the Wind is a novel showing the working of the unseen hand, and telling the story of a man who shirked his destiny, and who was forced to watch the career of another who rose to heights of national fame, while he himself drifted like chaff before the wind. It is a novel of incident illustrating a theory, and is therefore more dramatic than psychological. The action of life and destiny on character is more indicated than the action of character on life.

The Marble Aphrodite. ANTHONY KIRBY GILL

An imaginative story of a young sculptor who, inspired by Venus, produces an Aphrodite of amazing loveliness and nobility. Carroll, the chief character, is an idealist, a devotee of art, and a worshipper of beauty, and the main theme of the novel is centred in and about his creation of this statue. Other characters include a painter who encourages his young friend's idealism, a wealthy aristocrat of a cynical bent of mind, a beautiful and accomplished actress, a poet, and a society lady married to a man of evil reputation. The conflicting interests of these people, the effects of their actions, tragic and otherwise, the scenes in the studios and the society, theatrical, and Bohemian scenes, including the glimpse given of the night side of London life, form a realistic background or setting for the principal motive, which, though closely interwoven with it, is of a purely imaginative and idealistic character. Psychological analysis enters largely into the author's treatment, and the story reflects here and there certain mental movements of the day.

The Poodle-Woman. ANNESLEY KENEALY

Author of "Thus Saith Mrs Grundy."

Miss Annesley Kenealy's new novel deals with the feminine side of the great unrest of our time, and she sets herself to answer the questions "What do Women Want?" and "What is the cause of their great unrest?" It is a charming love story, dealing mainly with two women, a man, and a mannikin. It presents feminism from an entirely fresh standpoint, but polemics are entirely absent. In a series of living pictures it shows how the games of life and matrimony are played under rules which put all the best cards of the pack into men's hands. The heroine is an emotional Irish girl, with the reckless romance of the Celt and the chivalry of a woman, who keeps sweet through very bitter experiences. Possessing no world craft she is slave to her heart, and gives and forgives unto seventy times seven. The book is epigrammatic and full of humour.

The Romance of Bayard. LT.-COL. ANDREW C. P.

HAGGARD, D.S.O. Author of "The France of Joan of Arc," "Two Worlds," etc.

"The Romance of Bayard" is one of perennial interest, as a "life," as a "thing of beauty," is a joy for ever. The story of the chevalier, who was "without fear and without reproach" cannot too often be told. The story opens on the "Field of the Cloth of Gold," and its personelle includes Henry of England, Francis of France, the French Queen-mother, the Princess Marguerita, who loved Bayard with intense devotion, and Anne Boleyn, a young French maid of honour. It ends with Bayard's death during the fatal expedition into Italy in 1524. The romance places Marguerita and Anne Boleyn at his side at the last. Col Haggard's historical romances are all well known and highly popular at the libraries and with the general public, and this one is not likely to fall short of high appreciation.

A Durbar Bride. CHARLOTTE CAMERON

Author of "A Passion in Morocco," "A Woman's Winter in South America," etc.

This is a wonderfully interesting novel, conducting one through labyrinths of exciting scenes and chapters with not a dull moment in the entire production. It is written in Charlotte Cameron's most brilliant style. In the first chapters the author depicts the misery of a young bride whose husband became hopelessly insane during their honeymoon. The pathetic story graphically narrated of Muriel's unsatisfactory life, neither maid, wife, nor widow, and the injustice of the law which binds a woman until death to a mad man is admirably portrayed. Mrs. Cameron is the only writer who has as yet given us from an eye-witness point of view a romance on the Imperial Durbar at Delhi; where, as the representative of several papers, she had the opportunity of attending the entire ceremonials. The life at the Government Camps, the sweet love story of the hero and heroine, the simple marriage ceremony in Skinner's historic church at Delhi will prove a keen enjoyment to the readers. Their Majesties the Queen, and Queen Alexandra have graciously accepted copies of this novel.

The Career of Beauty Darling. DOLF WYLLARDE

Author of "The Riding Master," "The Unofficial Honeymoon."

"The Career of Beauty Darling" is a story of the musical comedy stage, and endeavours to set forth both the vices and virtues of the life without prejudice. If the temptations are manifold, the author finds much good also in those who pursue this particular branch of the profession, for she says "there are no kinder hearts in the world, I think, than those that beat under the finery of the chorus-girl, no better humanity than that which may be found behind the paint and powder and the blistered eyes." Miss Wyllarde has made plain statements in this, her latest book, and has not shrunk from the realism of the life; but, as she says, even the general public knows that the dazzle and glitter from the front of the footlights is a very different view to that which may be seen behind the curtain.

The Retrospect.

ADA CAMBRIDGE

Author of "Thirty Years in Australia," "A Little Minx," etc.

"There can be little hesitation in asserting that this is one of the most delightful books of the year."—*Aberdeen Free Press*

"Miss Cambridge has such a delightful style, and so much of interest to tell us, that the reader closes the book with the sensation of having bidden a dear friend farewell."

—*Bristol Times and Mirror*.

"Written throughout with an engaging literary grace."—*Scotsman*.

Francesca.

CECIL ADAIR

Author of "The Qualities of Mercy," "Canticute Towers," etc.

This author possesses all the qualities which make for popularity and can be relied upon to arrest and maintain interest from first to last. The *Guardian* reviewing "Canticute Towers" said—"In it we seem to see a successor of Rosa N. Carey," and those who admire the work of Miss Carey cannot do better than take the hint. A strong human interest always appeals to the reader and satisfies perusal.

The Strength of the Hills. HALLIWELL SUTCLIFFE

Author of "A Benedick in Arcady," "Priscilla of the Good Intent," etc.

In this novel Mr. Halliwell Sutcliffe returns to the Haworth Moorland which was the inspiration of all his earlier work; it deals with the strenuous life of the moors sixty years ago and will rank with his strongest and best works. Those who remember our author's "Man of the Moors," "An Episode in Arcady," "A Bachelor in Arcady," and "A Benedick in Arcady" will not hesitate to follow him anywhere across the moorlands in the direction of Arcadia.

Officer 666. BARTON W. CURRIE and AUGUSTIN

McHUGH

An uproarious piece of American wit fresh from the Gaiety Theatre, New York, which will be produced on the London boards and in France some time this autumn. It is from the pen of Mr. Augustin McHugh, who has associated himself with Mr. Barton W. Currie in producing it in novel form. Its dramatic success in America has been phenomenal; and whether as a play or a novel, it will doubtless receive a warm welcome in this country.

Devil's Brew.

MICHAEL W. KAYE

Author of "The Cardinal's Past," "A Robin Hood of France," etc.

Jack Armiston, awaking to the fact that life has other meaning than that given it by a fox-hunting squire, becomes acquainted with Henry Hunt, the socialist demagogue, but after many vicissitudes, during which he finds he has sacrificed friends and sweetheart to a worthless propaganda, he becomes instrumental in baulking the Cato Street Conspirators of their plot to murder the members of the Cabinet, and eventually regains his old standing—and Pamela. A spirited story.

The Fruits of Indiscretion. SIR WILLIAM MAGNAY

Author of "The Long Hand," "Paul Burdon," etc.

This is a story of murder and mystery, in which the interest is well sustained and the characters are convincing. It is absorbing, without being melodramatic, and thrilling without being sensational. There is to be a wedding at a country house on the eve of which the best man is killed in the hunting field. Captain Routham is asked to take his place, but disappears. His body is found on the railway track. Rolt, a famous detective, is put on the scent, and gradually probes the mystery. Routham had had a love affair with the heroine in former years, and had been black-mailing her. There is a rascally lawyer in the case who is killed in a carriage accident, and is so saved criminal consequences. In the end the heroine marries her lover.

The Tragedy of the Nile.

DOUGLAS SLADEN

Author of "The Unholy Estate," "The Tragedy of the Pyramids," etc.

A military novel dealing with the fate and re-conquest of Khartum. This is even more military than Mr. Sladen's "Tragedy of the Pyramids" and "The Unholy Estate." Mr. Sladen is at his best when he is describing battles, and the book is full of them, but, like Mr. Sladen's other books, it is also full of romance. The author, never content with an ordinary plain-sailing engagement between two young persons, selects one of the *crucis* which present themselves in real life and love. This time it is the case of a beautiful white woman who, being captured at the fall of Khartum, has to enter the harem of Wad-el-Nejumi, the bravest of all the generals of the Mahdi. When she is rescued on the fatal field of Toski, the question arises Can a white man marry her? There are great figures standing forth in Mr. Sladen's pages—above all, the heroic Gordon in his last great moments at Khartum—Wad-el-Nejumi, who stormed Khartum and died so grandly at Toski.

The Memoirs of Mimosa. Edited by ANNE ELLIOT

This is a book calculated to make as great a sensation as the famous *Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff*, which electrified a whole continent some years ago; or *The Diary of a Lost One*, which set Germany ringing more recently. It is the intimate and unflinching confession of a brilliant, erotic, and undisciplined woman, who resolves to "live every moment of her life," and succeeds in so doing at the cost of much suffering to herself and others. Her mixture of worldliness, sentiment, fancy, passion, and extraordinary *joie de vivre* make her a fascinating study of a type some what rare. At her death she bequeathed these Memoirs to the woman friend who edits them and presents them to the world. We get the woman's point of view in all matters—poetry, politics, sport, music, the stage, and, dominating all, the great problems of sex.

The Return of Pierre. DONAL HAMILTON HAINES

With a frontispiece from a painting by Edouard Detaille.

This is not a novel about the Franco-Prussian War, but the very human story of Pierre, with some of the scenes of the heroic struggle as a background. Pierre, a country lad, is the central figure. Other prominent figures are the woman Pierre loves, her father—a fine old Colonel of Dragoons—and a German spy, not without attractive qualities, whose fate becomes strangely entangled with theirs. The book abounds in striking situations, including the discovery and escape of the spy—the departure of the Dragoons for the war—the remorse of a French General who feels personally responsible for the men he has lost—night in a hospital-tent—the last flicker of the defence of Paris and the entry of the German troops.

The Incurrible Dukane. GEORGE C. SHEDI

This is a vigorous and inspiring story of Western life. Jimmy Dukane, son of a cement king, who, disgusted with his son's extravagances, gives him a limited sum and orders him to go and inspect a dam in course of construction in Nevada, or by way of a pleasant alternative—starve. Jimmy goes and passes through numerous adventures. Has his outfit stolen on his arrival at the nearest station, is knocked about, bullied and impounded by one of the dam men, and has to work as a navvy. Showing grit, he works his way up, and discovers that the manager is defrauding the company, and constructing a fatally faulty dam. Taking command, he saves the Company's reputation for sound workmanship. There is a love story in it, and Enid, the fair, fearless daughter of the superintendent, enables all to end well.

The Thread of Propf.

HEADON HILL

Author of "Troubled Waters," etc.

The principal theme of this volume is the abnormal astuteness of the conductor of a railway restaurant-car, whose power of observation and deduction enables him to solve the many absorbing "mysteries" that come under his ken, and which, as a preventer and detector of crime put him on a par with any of the great puzzle-readers of fiction. Mr. Headon Hill goes direct to the point, and carries the reader rapidly along from the first page to the last.

A Robin Hood of France.

MICHAEL W. KANE

Author of "The Duke's Vengeance," etc., etc.

Hated at court and falsely accused of murder, the young Sieur de Fontenac flees to the Forest of Fontainebleau, and becomes the leader of a band of robbers (King Mandrin), beloved of the oppressed *canaille*, but hated of the nobles, whom he defies and robs. Claire d'Orgueil, the only child of the Comte d'Orgueil, having lost heavily at cards, wagers the winner—who has her in his power, and who hopes to force her to marry him—that she will lure "King Mandrin" into the power of his enemies; but, arriving in the Forest of Fontainebleau, ends in falling in love with the "Robin Hood of France."

Neighbours of Mine.

R. ANDOM

Author of "We Three and Troddles," "In Fear of a Throne," etc.
With 70 original illustrations by L. GUNNIS.

This broadly farcical story of types and incidents of suburban life will afford as much amusement as the famous "Troddles" books which have in volume form successfully appealed to something like 200,000 readers of all classes, and should prove as popular with those who like a rollicking story. Now and again the author conveys a moral, discreetly, but generally he is content to be extravagantly amusing in depicting adventures, which are sufficiently out of the ordinary to be termed "singular." The book is cleverly and amusingly illustrated throughout the text by a popular artist, who has admirably succeeded in catching the drollery of the narrative.

The Loves of Stella.

MRS. SHIERS-MASON

Author of "Hubert Sherbrook, Priest."

Stella O'Donovan, a very poor but also very beautiful and quite unsophisticated Irish girl, lives in an old castle on a lovely but lonely Bay on the Irish coast. She has Spanish blood in her veins, and much of the impulsive and fascinating temperament of the Andalusians. Becoming heiress to a million of money, she decides to go to London and enter Society. Before her departure, a young Norwegian sculptor, Olaf Johansen, of striking appearance, comes to reside in the village. He at once falls in love with Stella, who returns his affection, but who, doubtful of herself, flees to London. Here she appears to meet Olaf again, but it is his twin brother impersonating him. Stella at once succumbs to his love-making, and many highly dramatic scenes follow.

Damosel Croft.

MURRAY GILCHRIST

World says—"As good as taking a holiday to read this tranquil tale of Peakland and its people. . . . The book is redolent of peace and rural beauty and restfulness."

Standard says—" . . . delicious interiors, glimpses of country shining with happiness, old customs and traditions, leaving us at the last with a sense of rest and tranquility, worth for its refreshment, a thousand plots, a thousand popular romances."

A Babe in Bohemia.

FRANK DANBY

Author of "The Heart of a Child," "Dr. Phillips," etc.

This author is not a prolific writer, and, therefore, every work from her pen is awaited with much interest. She stands alone among the best modern writers for originality and freshness in style. This full-length novel has been out of print for many years and has now been practically rewritten by the author. Although the thread of the story remains every page has been extensively revised, and will be found to be as good as anything recently done by this popular writer.

The Consort. MRS. EVERARD COTES (SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN). Author of "The Burnt Offering," "Cousin Cinderella," "The Path of a Star," etc.

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